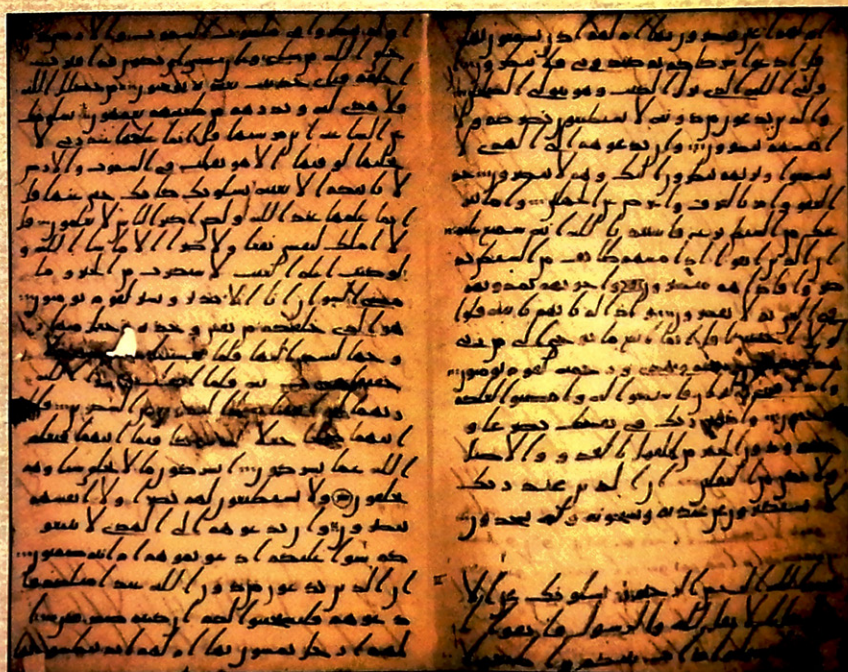




AL-FURQĀN
ISLAMIC HERITAGE FOUNDATION
Centre for the Study of the Philosophy of Islamic Law

PALAEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS OF QUR'ĀNIC MANUSCRIPTS AND THE QUR'ĀNIC FRAGMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM



QASIM AL-SAMARRAI

**PALAEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS
OF QUR'ĀNIC MANUSCRIPTS**

and the Qur'ānic Fragments of the University of Birmingham



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First Edition: 2017 CE/ 1438 A.H.

ISBN: 978-1-78814-689-0



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Lecture Series

**PALAEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS
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Qasim Al-Samarrai

(Leiden - Holland)



Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation
Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts

Foreword

Dear Readers,

This lecture, entitled **“Palaeographical Aspects of Qur’ānic Manuscripts and the Qur’ānic Fragments of the University of Birmingham”**, was delivered by Professor Qasim Al-Samarrai, as part of the series of lectures organised by the Al-Furqān Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts.

The lecture took place in London, on 23rd November 2015, and resonated with the news that materialised earlier that year about the discovery of some fragments of Qur’ān kept at the Mingana Collection in the Birmingham University Library. In July of that year, when a PhD researcher looked closely at some fragments inside a more recent copy of the Holy Book (Qur’ān), it was decided to carry out a radiocarbon dating test. The tests were carried out by the Oxford University Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, and they showed that the parchment (sheep or goat skin) was from the period between 568 and 645 CE (these tests provide a range of dates).

Based on these results, researchers concluded that the manuscript was among the earliest written textual evidence of the Islamic Holy Book known to survive.

These four pages of the Qur’ān, in early Arabic script, sparked fierce debate among scholars.

The assertion that the document, kept at Birmingham University, is part of one of the world’s oldest copies of the Qur’ān, was strongly disputed by many scholars in the field of codicology and palaeography, who pointed out that the science of carbon dating is contradicted by other evidence.

Among these scholars was Professor Qasim Al-Samarrai, Professor Emeritus of Palaeography and Codicology.

Professor Al-Samarrai's immediate reaction - after the news spread about the Birmingham fragments - was:

“The fragments of the Qur’ān folios that were found at Birmingham are not at all what they are claimed to be. They in fact belong to the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AH (after *Hijrah*), if not later. All the features in them: the script, dotting, use of gold and red ink, as well as the separation of verses (*Ayāt*) and chapters (*Suwar*)...etc., indicate that they might have been written on parchments older than the script. Therefore, they are not as early as thought. Surprisingly enough, Berlin and Tübingen claim the same with their own fragments.”

In order to shed further light on this issue, the Al-Furqān Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts organised this lecture, where Professor Qasim Al-Samarrai, after examining the Birmingham folios, gave a detailed insight, with a special focus on Qur’ānic manuscripts palaeographical aspects in general, the accuracy of carbon dating tests, the Uthman copies of the Qur’an, as well as other aspects related to this topic.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Al-Samarrai for his enlightening and interesting lecture, and I am delighted to present this lecture in a published form, hoping that it will be of benefit for the researchers and those interested in this field.

Ahmed Zaki Yamani, Chairman
Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation

Biographical Note

Professor Qasim al-Samarrai

- **1958:** BA (Hon) in Arabic Literature and History from the Faculty of Education, University of Baghdad.
- **1965:** PhD in comparative mysticism (Ascension in Mystical Writings) from the University of Cambridge, UK, under the supervision of Prof A.J. Arbery. At the same time, he held the post of lecturer at the Department of Oriental Studies, Cambridge University, UK.
- **1966 – 1969:** Assistant professor at the Faculty of Shari'ah and at the Faculty of Arts – Department of Philosophy of the University of Baghdad, as well as at al-Mustansiriyya University in Baghdad.
- **1970 – 1976:** Held the post of lecturer of Arabic literature and Islamic History at the Department of Arabic & Islamic Studies of the University of Leiden, the Netherlands.
- **1977 – 1980:** Affiliated Professor to the Department of Islamic Studies, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Leiden, the Netherlands.
- **1980 – 1981:** Held the post of Professor of Islamic Philosophy at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Qâr Yunus, Banghâzi, Libya.
- **1981 – 1983:** Held the post of Professor of Islamic Civilisation and Islamic Education in the Faculty of Arabic Studies and at the Research Center, both of the University of Muhammed bin Saud in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

➤ **1983 – 1986:** Held the post of Professor of Arabic & Islamic Palaeography and Codicology in the Department of Libraries & Information at the Faculty of Social Studies of the University of Muhammed bin Saud in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

➤ **1987- 2003:** Affiliated Professor to the Department of Studies of Comparative Religions, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Leiden, the Netherlands.

Professor Al-Samarrai has published more than 60 books, the last of which is a critical edition of *Al-Badr al-Sāfir* by Al-Udfawī, in 3 vols. (together with Tariq Tatami); published by Al-Rābiṭa al-Muḥammadiyya lil-‘Ulamā’, Rabat 2015.

He has supervised a few MA and PhD dissertations in Palaeography and Codicology in the Department of Libraries & Information at the Faculty of Social Studies of the University of Muhammed bin Saud in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Also, he has participated extensively in national and international congresses, as well as many training courses on handling and cataloguing Islamic Manuscripts, organised by Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation (such as the courses held in Istanbul, London, Kuala Lumpur, Cairo, Casablanca and Rabat), as well as in Jum’a al- Majid Center in Dubai, King Faisal Center for Islamic Studies in Riyadh, the King Fahd National Library in Riyadh, the Department of Libraries of King Saud University in Riyadh and King Abdul Aziz Library in Riyadh.

PALAEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS OF QUR'ĀNIC MANUSCRIPTS

and the Qur'ānic Fragments of the University of Birmingham

By

Qasim Al-Samarrai

(Leiden- Holland)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to stand here amongst you to correct a misconception that has been propagated by wide sections of the media and a number of Orientalists. It is not my intention to turn my lecture today into a polemical debate, far from it, but one of the things that troubles me most is the wilful ignorance that has been growing day by day, to such an extent that it now constitutes a serious threat to genuine, objective scholarship and has resulted in confusion amongst the general public.

This has prompted me to share my humble thoughts with you in connection with the so called: "discovery of the oldest folios of the Qur'ān at the University Library of Birmingham."

I begin by apologising for my poor level of English, but I hope this may be tolerated if only for the simple fact that:

The truth is a bitter pill, but it remedies all lies,

or as George Orwell stated: “In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.” This is a quotation which I hope all media outlets will adopt, rather than choosing to propagate sensational reports that mislead and misinform the public merely for the sake of financial gain. Truth in the media is a powerful instrument which counters disinformation. There can be no half-truths in the coverage of the Truth.

I have more respect for you, Ladies and Gentlemen, and for myself than to use such methods as stating a few platitudes, designed exclusively for Western consumption. I will simply state the facts as they are and leave the judgment to you.

Our topic today is thorny, intricate, and somewhat muddling for those who claim justly or otherwise to be experts in Qur’anic palaeography and codicology.

Facts not fiction

I would like to begin by stating a number of facts we are certain of:

1) **Fact one:** We possess no dated Qur’ān copy belonging to the first three centuries of the *Hijrah*.

2) **Fact two:** We possess almost 250,000, if not more, fragments and leaves of Qur’anic text written on either parchments or papyri and scattered throughout the world; however, not a single one bears a colophon with an explicit date. I therefore strongly challenge any scholar working on Qur’anic palaeography, and in particular any “revisionist”, to produce a single dated folio belonging to the span of time that lies between the year 40 AH/650 CE and 250/862.¹

3) **Fact three:** The C14 test is notoriously doubtful, if not inaccurate, due to the pollution in the atmosphere and the

method of manufacturing parchments that was used in the East.² New research shows that using fossil fuels pumps a type of carbon into the atmosphere that confuses the dating technique.³ This fact will be dealt with later.

4) **Fact four:** The text of the Qur'ān depended from the beginning of the revelation on memory, not writing. As one Orientalist states:

“The transmission of the Qur'ān after the death of Muḥammad was essentially static, rather than organic. There was a single text, and nothing significant, not even allegedly abrogated material could be taken out nor could anything be put in.”⁴

Or as one contemporary revisionist likes to put it:

“The Qur'ān was revealed in actual language, not in scriptural form. The script available at the time of revelation was highly defective⁵, so that it constituted little more than an aid for those who knew the text by heart already...being well aware that the oral tradition is the more important and valid one.”⁶

My former teacher and supervisor, A. J. Arberry, in his *The Koran Interpreted* (ix-xii), states that:

“Apart from certain orthographical modifications of the originally somewhat primitive method of writing, intended to render unambiguous and easy the task of reading and recitation, the Koran as printed in the twentieth century is identical with the Koran as authorized by 'Uthmān more than 1,300 years ago”.

My former teacher Montgomery Watt formulates the whole process in these words:

“On the whole the information which has reached us about the ‘Uthmānic codices suggests that there was no great variation in the actual contents of the Qur’ān in the period immediately after the Prophet’s death. The order of the *suras* was apparently not fixed, and there were many slight variations in reading, but of other differences there is no evidence.”⁷

The oral tradition: is a phenomenon very unique to Islam whereby the whole book is memorised; although we know that some Buddhist and Hindu monks recite portions of their holy text in their sermons. There were, and still are, many millions of people who have memorized the whole Qur’ān, and millions of these have learnt the Qur’ān via a direct transmission, starting with the Prophet himself. The chains of transmission (*isnāds*) of the different reciters (*qurrā’*) are recorded in the biographical sources, published and unpublished. However, it remains difficult for non-Muslims to believe that, in some parts of the world, long religious texts are still fully memorized and transmitted from one generation to the next.⁸

5) **Fact five:** In spite of all the information available regarding ‘Uthmān’s copies, from the many sources at our disposal, no copy belonging to ‘Uthmān’s time has survived. ‘Uthmān’s copies were totally devoid of all diacritical signs, dotting, punctuations and *sura* divisions⁹, and although many existing copies have been falsely attributed to him or to individuals contemporary with him, no early copy of the Qur’ān still remains.

6) **Fact six:** All estimates of the dating of existing folios are pure conjecture and guess work with no exception at all.

7) **Fact seven:** Although there exist many complete and incomplete copies of the Qur’ān in public and private libraries all

over the world¹⁰ – such as the two Samarqand copies, the one in the mosque of al-Ḥusayn in Cairo attributed to Caliph 'Uthmān¹¹, the copy or copies in the Egyptian Dār al-Kutub, the San'a copy recently published by IRCICA in Istanbul attributed to Imam 'Alī, the one in the Topkapi Palace Museum also attributed to the Caliph 'Uthmān¹², several in the Najaf mausoleum, several in Iran attributed to 'Alī or to one of his descendents, and others elsewhere¹³, none are dated. Nor do any of them bear the name of the scribe, although al-Nadīm does provide us with a list of names of those scribes who were tasked with copying the Qur'ān during the Prophet's time and afterwards.

Equally significant is the fact that we now possess several dated Syriac manuscripts belonging to the same period as the fragments that underwent radiocarbon dating, or even earlier.¹⁴ The question may be asked: why do we not possess any dated copy of the Qur'ān or even a single folio with colophon? No one working in the field of early Qur'anic palaeography or codicology has ever answered this question. In F. Deroche's opinion:

“The fragmentary state of the evidence at hand and the lack of any direct information as to the date of the copies are actually a major impediment in the study of the early material and have been used as an argument against its dating prior to the third/ninth century.”¹⁵

Hard as it may seem, the actual reason, which he and others have not contemplated, is very simple to see. In order to keep the purity and the integrity of the holy text intact, during the first three centuries, no scribe ever dared to add his name to the holy text. Nonetheless, al-Nadīm (d. circa 380/990) relates:

“I saw many Qur’ān copies, written in bulky script on parchments, in which their copyists mention that they are copies of Ibn Mas’ūd’s copy of the Qur’ān. I could not find any two of them similar to each other, in any respect.”

This means they had been intentionally faked for sectarian purposes due to the troubles that erupted between the Shiites and the Sunnis in Baghdad prior to his time.

In a similar vein, he reports:

“I saw a copy of the Qur’ān written about two hundred years ago (about 170 AH/786 CE) containing *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*.”

Al-Nadīm here alludes to certain reports that Ibn Mas’ūd¹⁶ excluded *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* and the last two *sūras* from his own copy.¹⁷ He also reports:

“In my own time I saw a copy of the Qur’ān, written by ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib himself, with a few folios missing. The Banū Ḥasan inherited this copy and handed it down from generation to generation.”

He does not tell us if these copies that he saw contained any colophons.

The Episode

The episode began when PhD student Alba Fedeli¹⁸ undertook a close study of the two folios she found among the Mingana collection of the University of Birmingham. The University decided to carry out a radiocarbon dating test and reported that the results were “startling”. The tests, carried out by the Oxford University Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, showed that the fragments, written on sheep or goat skin, were among the very oldest surviving texts of the Qur’ān.

These tests suggested that, with a probability of more than 95%, the parchment was produced sometime between 568 and 645 CE. The University's Director of Special Collections, Susan Worrall, said that researchers had not expected "in our wildest dreams" that it would be so old. Professor David Thomas remarked:

"The dating of the Birmingham folios would mean it was quite possible that the person who had written them would have been alive at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. The person who actually wrote them could well have known the Prophet Muḥammad. He would have seen him probably; he would maybe have heard him preach. He may have known him personally - and that really is quite a thought to believe in." ¹⁹

Furthermore, it is also reported that leading Oxford academics stated:

"Carbon dating of the parchment, which suggested it dated from between 568-645 CE, may change our understanding of the way in which Islam's holy book was compiled. Some historians argue that the earliest end of the date range also leaves open the theory that the document was in existence during the Prophet's childhood or even before his birth." ²⁰

This is the gist of the whole Episode.

One just wonders what kind of scholars they are! We know that some manuscripts of the Qur'ān along with a great many others were acquired or *stolen* by Jean-Louis Asselin de Cherville (d.1822)²¹ in Egypt at a time of diplomatic rivalry between Germany and France in stealing parchments. The story of how the French diplomat de Cherville acquired or

stole them is explained by the American orientalist Dr. David Stephen Powers.²² F. Deroche says that Asselin de Cherville's widow seems to have tried to sell this and other ancient Islamic manuscripts to the British Library in the 1820s,²³ but they ended up in the National Library in Paris, where they have remained ever since.²⁴ Deroche seems to have overlooked (*spirited away*) the fact that Asselin de Cherville's family in Marseilles were those who sold the whole collection in 1833, a few years after his death, to the Bibliothèque National in Paris.

The other remaining Qur'ān fragments of the Bibliothèque National were bought (*sic*) or *stolen* by Jean-Josef Marcel who accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte during his Campaign in Egypt and Syria (1798–1801). They consequently also ended up in the Bibliothèque National in Paris, while the remnants of Marcel's Qur'ān folios were sold by his widow to the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg.

The ultimate provenance of all these folios is the 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ mosque in Fustāṭ, Egypt. In the same manner, the Birmingham portion of these manuscripts was purchased by Mingana in 1936 from the German antiquarian dealer in Leiden (the Netherlands) Erik von Scherling, who acquired them along with other manuscripts now in Birmingham University Library via his Egyptian agent(s).²⁵ Francois Deroche confirms that "the pages in Paris are part of the same Koran as Birmingham's."²⁶

Paradoxically, the same lady who stirred up the frenzy about the Birmingham fragment, Alba Fedeli, was well aware in 2011, if not earlier, of the close similarity of this fragment with the Paris and other fragments.²⁷ Amazingly, she was herself also involved

with the Tübingen fragment, but she cautiously attributed the Tübingen manuscript to the 8th century CE, and commented upon some of its variants.²⁸ This manuscript, according to the Tübingen report, has now been subjected to radiocarbon analysis under the auspices of the *Corpus Coranicum* project and has been dated to 649-675 CE with 95.4% probability.

If we accept this date, the Tübingen fragment is either a bit older or a bit younger than the Birmingham fragment, but with only one exception: it did not stir up the same media frenzy. The wave of media frenzy did, however, engulf two other European Institutions, the State Library of Berlin and the University Library of Leiden, both of which claimed to possess the oldest fragments of the Qur'ān, and both of which based their claim solely on the results of radiocarbon dating.

That is not the end of the Episode.

Another report concludes:

“It may be argued that because radiocarbon dating creates a range of possible ages, there are a handful of other manuscripts in public and private collections which overlap. So this makes it impossible to say that any are definitively the oldest. But the latest possible date of the Birmingham discovery – 645 – would put it among the very oldest.”²⁹

Let us forget for the time being about the hysteria which the media such as the BBC³⁰, CNN, *Al-Jazeera*³¹, the *New York Times*, the *Daily Mail*, the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*³², the *Birmingham Mail*³³, and *The Independent*³⁴ have created. All of them and other outlets have blown the whole issue out of all proportions and beyond any comprehension.

However, the heart of the whole matter lies, as I see it, not so much with the media which seeks sensational news for the public, but with those scholars involved, who dare not admit anything counter to the official prevailing declaration, and who are not willing to admit that, what they have stated in the media is a complete disaster for objective scholarship and sound judgment. Jumping straight to a conclusion, one of them, for instance, declared that the scribe may have seen the Prophet, while the other one declared: “the Birmingham Qur’ān fragment that could shake Islam after carbon dating suggests it is older than the Prophet Muḥammad.” This is frankly farcical, as it is clearly based on questionable and inconclusive evidence.

Furthermore, the *Daily Mail* published a report on 31st August 2015 written by Jennifer Newton, in which she claims that carbon dating test found that the pages were produced between 568 and 654 CE. She reinforced her statement by saying: but several historians now say that the parchment may predate Muḥammad. They believe that this discovery could rewrite the early history of Islam. This reporter, unfortunately, does not substantiate her claim by giving the names of these supposed historians, in order for us to know if they are genuine scholars or fictitious.

The BBC went even further by alleging:

“There are claims that these could be fragments from the very first complete version of the Koran, commissioned by Abū Bakr, a companion of the Prophet Muḥammad - and that it is the most important discovery ever for the Muslim world. It seems likely the fragments in Birmingham, at least 1,370 years old, were once held in Egypt’s oldest mosque, the Mosque of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ in *Fuṣṭāṭ*.”³⁵

One just wonders who on earth has supplied the BBC with such baseless journalistic information? Another journalist wrote:

“Leading Oxford academics this week said carbon dating of the parchment, which suggested it dated from between 568-645 CE, may change our understanding of the way in which Islam’s holy book was compiled.”³⁶

Unfortunately, some Western Orientalists seem less concerned about establishing the facts, being instead happy to deplorably twist every small detail to suit their already preconceived notions. An example of this concerns Dr Keith Small³⁷, said to be an expert on Qur’anic texts at the University of Oxford. He told *The Times*:

“This gives more ground to what have been peripheral views of the Koran’s genesis, such as that Mohamed and his early followers used a text that was already in existence and shaped it to fit their own political and theological agenda, rather than Moḥamed receiving a revelation from heaven.”³⁸

Destined though they are to fail, these propaganda efforts do not have to be quite so comically bad as those presented by these so-called “experts”!!!

Dr Small’s opinion appears to be as a shrill echo of Christopher Luxemburg’s theory that “the Qur’ān or parts of the Qur’ān are derived from pre-existing Christian Aramaic texts that were manipulated to create the Qur’ān we know of today.” He makes this claim without producing any relevant Christian Aramaic parts to prove that the Qur’ān is indeed derived from them. Above all, he neglects the linguistically proven fact that Aramaic

is the mother of Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac, just as Latin was the mother of a number of modern European languages, something which surely accounts for the similarities between them. In the same manner, the Father of History, Herodotus, stated that the Phoenician language was the origin of the Greek language.

Answering Dr Small's preposterous statement, I would say: Are we then at liberty to claim as well that the New Testament predated Jesus and the Old Testament predated Moses and all the faiths and religions of the world are falsified and fabricated by their founders? I leave the entire question to the Jewish and Christian theologians to answer him.³⁹

In any meaningful scholarly sense, all these ideas, propagated by the media on the one hand and by those who are supposed to be scholars dealing with the Birmingham fragment on the other, are based on tentative rather than conclusive evidence, as we shall see.

Strangely enough, given the ferocious controversies that have swirled around this fragment, another impulsive American journalist wrote:

"A manuscript explicating the teaching of Muḥammad while he was still alive provides fodder for Islamic fundamentalist extremists to interpret the Koran and other Islamic teachings that much more literally. They will feel further empowered to continue with their schizophrenic outlook on life with their spiritual foot planted in the seventh century."⁴⁰

This is not all.

Some years ago, a Christian missionary website published a ferocious critique of Islam in which they strenuously

attempted to highlight discrepancies they claim to have found in the text of the Samarqand copy of the Qur'ān. It caused a degree of commotion and indignation amongst certain Muslim scholars, but not as much as the Birmingham discovery. Paradoxically, the entire critique was based on a facsimile copy of the Samarqand Qur'ān. As it happens, in the late 19th century, the manuscript was in St. Petersburg, where it was studied by the Russian Orientalist A. N. Shebunin.⁴¹ He gave a detailed account of the codex and examined the peculiarities of its orthography. So great was the interest in this codex that in 1905 Pissareff was encouraged to publish a facsimile edition.⁴² He did this by photographic process after attempting to carefully retrace the text of folios where the writing had been partially or totally obliterated. It has since been recognized that Pissareff's re-inking of the text in the dulled folios resulted in many mistakes and interpolations. These intentional or unintentional changes to the original text have caused scholars to handle this manuscript with extreme caution. The critique was, therefore, based on a faulty facsimile edition that was amended without taking into account the techniques for *rasm al-Muṣḥaf*, as explained thoroughly and diligently by al-Bāqillānī, al-Dānī, al-Sijistānī and others.

This is not an isolated attempt to apply what is called 'an inner and outer textual criticism' to the Qur'ān, in imitation of the many early textual criticism studies already applied to the Biblical texts, where countless discrepancies have been singled out and thoroughly studied by many Jewish and Christian scholars alike.⁴³

The most serious scholarly move was initiated in 1858 by a committee in the French Academy des Inscription et Belles-Lettres, which organized a scholarly competition with the

subject title: *faire l'histoire critique du texte du Coran*. (Make the critical history of the text of the Qur'ān). This initiative resulted in only two serious scholarly contributions by the Italian Michele Amari and the German Theodor Nöldeke.⁴⁴ Further attempts were made by Nöldeke, Goldziher, Arthur Jeffery and others, who argued that the text of the Qur'ān was not committed to writing in the lifetime of the Prophet or of the Companions, but the writing of the Qur'ān began around the second or third century of the *Hijra*.

That is not all.

To add insult to injury, Mingana⁴⁵ himself with the missionary A.S. Lewis published as early as 1914: *Leaves from three ancient Qur'āns, possibly pre-'Othmanic*.⁴⁶ Since then the issue lay dormant until the end of 1970, when the debate about the composition and date at which the Qur'ān was compiled was stirred up by the hyper-critical schools of thoughts, led by the then leading revisionist John Wansbrough.⁴⁷ His iconoclastic views were quickly adopted by his disciples Patricia Crone and Michael Cook in *Hagarism*.⁴⁸ They claim that there is no hard evidence for the existence of the Qur'ān in any form before the last decade of the seventh century, and the tradition which places this rather obscure revelation in its historical context is not attested to before the middle of the eight century.

Another revisionist, Robert Morey, puts it this way:

"Modern scholars such as Cook, Crone, Wansbrough, Rippin, etc. are giving us a totally different model of the origins of Islam and the Qur'ān. Once you put aside the Qur'ān and the Hadith, you begin to see that

Islam created the Qur'ān instead of the Qur'ān creating Islam. Islam created a mythological Muḥammad who is nothing like the historical Muḥammad, if that was his true name. The Qur'ān had multiple authors from various locations who combined different legends and materials to make the stories found in it. It took 150-200 years for the Qur'ān to appear. Muḥammad never saw the present Qur'ān and would disown it if shown it. He is not the source of it. This explains the contradictions and mistakes in it.”⁴⁹

It should be noted that the culmination of this revisionist trend was symbolized by the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988). This trend is still vigorously alive and kicking in certain European and American orientalist circles and academic institutions, supported and financed by the European Union.

The missing link

Let us now turn our attention to exploring the missing link or the apparent connection between the parchments and the radiocarbon dating, to find the hidden secret in both.

Parchment is most commonly made of calfskin, sheepskin or goatskin, and was historically used for writing documents in the East and the West. Parchment is limed, scraped, rubbed and dried under tension. It is not tanned, and is thus different from leather. The process of making parchments differs considerably between the East and the West. In Pre-Islamic poetry one encounters rich references to writings, books, (*kutub*, *kitāb*), parchment *raqq*, hide *adīm*, papyrus (*qirtās*) and inkpot⁵⁰ (*dawāh*). We, therefore,

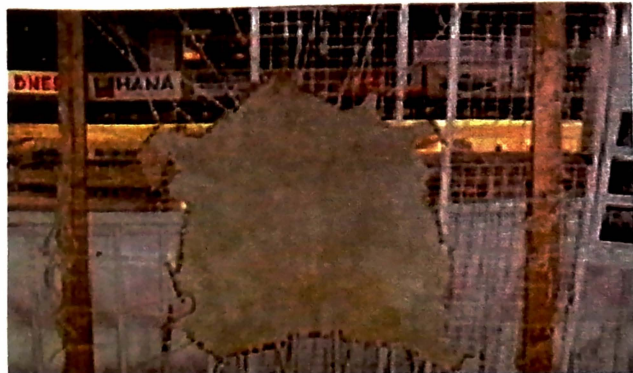
infer from the references, that the manufacturing of parchments was a thriving industry in pre-Islamic times in Mecca, Medina, Ta'if and elsewhere in the Hejaz.

In the Middle East and North Africa, particularly in Morocco, the leather industry is still flourishing. The term 'morocco' as a fine flexible hand grained leather, made from goatskin, tanned with sumac⁵¹, is well known to western binders. Even today, the making of parchments for drums, tambourines and other musical instruments is flourishing in the East as well as in the West.

Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Notwithstanding the striking similarity between making parchment in the East and the West, the main difference lies in the materials and substances used, such as lime, alum, Epsom salts, (such as detergent and slabs of sea salt, which are mined and exported), called *milḥa ḥayya* (living salt) in Morocco. Also in Egypt the Wadi al-Natron which refers to the presence of eight different lakes in the region that produce the *Natron* sea salt, which is well known.

In the West, while the parchment was in the process of drying in its frame, a number of different pre-treatments such as pumice stone powder and chalk were sometimes rubbed into the surface of the wet skin.⁵²

Furthermore, in the East, the weather and temperature played a crucial role in the production of parchments. We are informed by al-Nadīm that there were two kinds of parchments: one was extremely stiff and hard, because gypsum solution mingled with calcium hydroxide was used in the production and coating (*dibāghat al-nūra*); and the other one was the Kufic, in which dates were used (*dibāghat al-tamr*). This made it smooth, supple, flexible and pliable. Such a method of parchment production, where organic substances were used, seems to have been common in the East. We can infer that the organic substances play a crucial role in determining the result of the radiocarbon test, as we shall shortly see.

Palaeography, as a scholarly discipline, requires much patience, prudence and above all great knowledge and experience, gained through keen interest and persistence in observing, discerning and utilizing every minute detail

at hand. It becomes a consuming hobby or rather a special gift which occupies the heart and soul of the researcher. As palaeography is crucial to the study of the early copies of the Qur'ān, its role in studying the Birmingham parchments is critical in providing us with direct or indirect evidence about an approximate dating. This is exactly what I did when I myself personally examined them, as we shall soon see.

If we leave the carbon dating aside, the Oxford Laboratory did not provide us with any scientifically acceptable evidence as to whether the Birmingham parchments were actually made of sheep or goat skin. For a diligent palaeographer the process of determining either of them is very simple with the use of a special magnifying instrument or ultraviolet beam to trace the roots of either the hair or wool which protrude from the parchment. On both sides of the parchment these instruments help us to trace what the copyist did before he prepared it for writing, whether this be rubbing, scraping, burnishing, ruling or coating its surface with an organic substance like egg glair solution, gelatine made of animal bones, wheat starch or Arabic gum.⁵³ This process is called in English terminology: sizing.⁵⁴ If these substances were added to the surface of the parchment, the result of the radiocarbon dating is thrown into complete disarray and doubt.

As a matter of fact, we have tangible proof that this is the case, in the form of thousands of folios, including entire fragments already subjected to the radiocarbon dating process, which retain their pliability and flexibility until today, overcoming every kind of weather condition and calamity.

Now, in the very words of the Oxford Laboratory itself:

“For radiocarbon dating to be possible, the material must once have been part of a living organism. This means that things like stone, metal and pottery cannot usually be directly dated by this means unless there is some organic material embedded or left as a residue. The radiocarbon date tells us when the organism was alive (not when the material was used). This fact should always be remembered when using radiocarbon dates. The dating process is always designed to try to extract the carbon from a sample which is most representative of the original organism”.⁵⁵

The simplified approach described above does not tell the whole story. There are two reasons why the radiocarbon date is not a true calendar age:

- i. **Atmospheric variations:** the radiocarbon concentration of the atmosphere has not always been constant; in fact it has varied significantly in the past.
- ii. Further complications arise when the carbon in a sample has not taken a straightforward route from the atmosphere to the organism, and hence, to the measured sample. Common examples are:

1. **Contamination:** where material from the soil or conservation work becomes incorporated into the sample resulting in an admixture of carbon with different radiocarbon content; the purpose of chemical pre-treatment is to remove all such material.

2. **Reservoir effects:** these occur, for example, when some of the carbon reaches the sample by way of the oceans; because the radiocarbon composition of the oceans differs from that of the atmosphere, this can lead to erroneous dates; stable isotope measurements can be used to see if this effect is present since the stable isotope concentration of the oceans is also different.”⁵⁶

Here we may simply ask: did the Oxford Laboratory carry out this process before announcing the results of the carbon dating?

F. Deroche, a leading French Qur’ān palaeographer has stated that he has “reservations about radiocarbon dating and there have been cases where manuscripts with known dates have been tested and the results have been incorrect.”⁵⁷

Be that as it may, none of the scholars working on the Qur’ān parchments has ever considered the fact that the atmosphere has been drastically polluted by radioactive fallout since 1950 when the first atomic bomb was tested, not to mention the disastrous consequence of the Chernobyl disaster in Russia in 1986, and the English and the Japanese accidents, among many others. There have been 99 accidents at nuclear power plants worldwide. Fifty-seven accidents have occurred since the Chernobyl disaster, and 57% (56 out of 99) of all nuclear-related accidents have occurred in the USA. Serious nuclear power plant accidents include the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster (2011), Chernobyl disaster (1986), Three Mile Island accident (1979), and the SL-1 accident (1961).⁵⁸

We alluded earlier to the effects of fossil fuels⁵⁹, but those scholars did not consider the effects of carbon emissions in

the atmosphere. Scientists have stated that:

“The pace of emissions even eclipses the onset of the biggest-known natural surge in fossil records, 56 million years ago, that was perhaps driven by a release of frozen stores of greenhouse gases beneath the seabed.”⁶⁰ They add:

“The rate of carbon emissions is higher than at any time in fossil records stretching back 66 million years to the age of the dinosaurs.”⁶¹

According to a study that sounds the alarm about risks to nature from manmade global warming:

“That ancient release, which drove temperatures up by an estimated 5 degrees Celsius (9 Fahrenheit) and damaged marine life by making the oceans acidic, is often seen as a parallel to the risks from the current build-up of carbon in the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels.”⁶²

Now, do we need another proof to justify our assertion that radiocarbon dating is a notoriously unreliable tool upon which to base any hurried judgments??

The most profound challenge faced by modern palaeographers dealing with the Qur'ānic fragments, however, is the fact that, as mentioned above, we do not possess any parchments actually bearing a date. Therefore, it is impossible to be certain about any other evidence provided either by carbon dating or by the style of the script. This remains an insurmountable obstacle in their research. Some palaeographers overstate the importance of C14 dating. It is,

in fact, a factor but not the prime factor. The researcher must consider different options, other than the differences in the styles of the script used by the scribes.

A keen palaeographer must reconsider the opinion that the development of the Qur'ānic script was not dictated by political changes, as F. Deroche in his very informative study maintains.⁶³ It is an artistic expression bound by time and circumstances to create a sense of beauty and personal achievement. In this regard, the scribe as an individual endeavours to perfect his aesthetic (*aestheticus*) skill in order to suit his own time and milieu; rather than arguing: "the history of the Qur'ānic text may be the subject of debate, although it is reflected in its handwritten transmission, or by the deliberate iteration of the style of writing."⁶⁴

Having an artistic aspiration, the scribe, like any artist, strives to perfect his own skill within an established environment. As an individual, the scribe earns his living by copying the Qur'ānic text or any other text for whosoever is interested in obtaining a copy for his own use; not necessarily as the result of being commissioned by the state or some patron for political ends. He uses any script that he finds fit for the purpose, and he is therefore liable to commit scribal mistakes in the process; a familiar phenomenon to every critical editor of any text. Just as al-Nadīm informs us, apart from the *Makkī* and *Madanī* scripts, there were 16 other scripts which the scribes used to write the Qur'ānic text.

As all the fragments from Birmingham, Berlin, Tübingen, the British Museum, Paris and other places belong to the same time and the same provenance, it is an entirely erroneous exercise to consider them representatives of the whole period, without

even comparing the *Hijāzī* script of the Qur'anic parchments with the script of hundreds, if not thousands, of official documents we now possess (Fig3-10); nor with inscriptions we find on stones, coins, tombstones (some of which predated even the Qur'anic recensions), milestones and monuments.⁶⁵

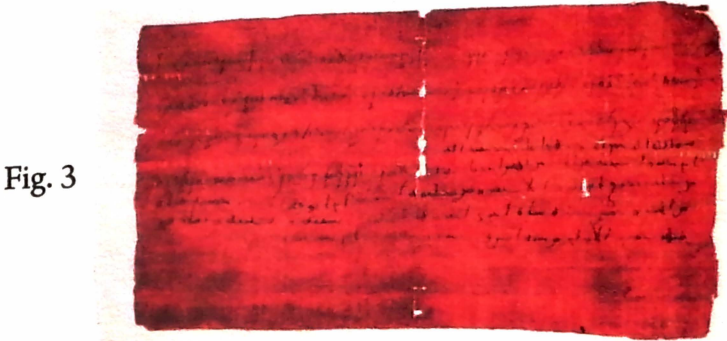


Fig. 3

سما الله الرحمن الرحيم ما احسنه الله
 ام جدوا حنة من الله من احسنه الله
 من خلفه الله ام جدوا ما لا يصدره من خلفه الله
 من الله وحسنه الله ما لا يصدره من الله وحسنه الله
 نتهل حدى الاولى من سنة الله وحسنه الله

Fig

Tracing of the Ahnas papyrus inscription.

- ١ - بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم • هذا ما اخذ عبد الله
- ٢ - ابن جبير واصبه من الجزر من اهنس اخذنا
- ٣ - من خليفة تذرقي ابن ابو قير الاصفر ، ومن
 خليفة اصطنق ابن ابو قير الاكبر خمسين شاة
- ٤ - من الجزر • وخمسة عشرة شاة اخرى اجزرها
 اصحب سنة وكتبه وتقله في
- ٥ - شهر جمدى الاول من سنة اثنتين وعشرين
 وكتب ابن حديده •

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

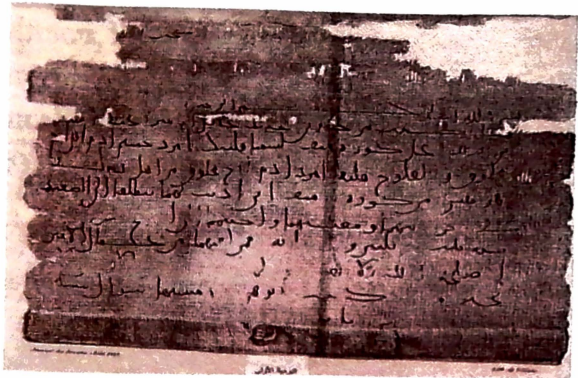


Fig. 7

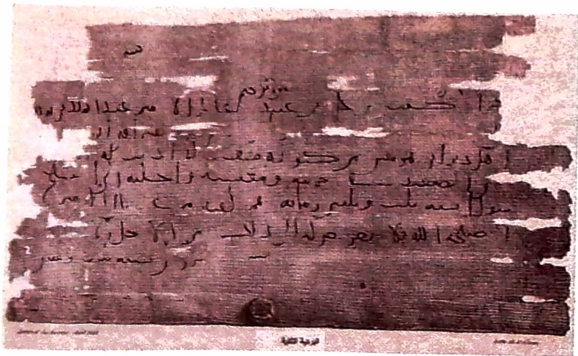
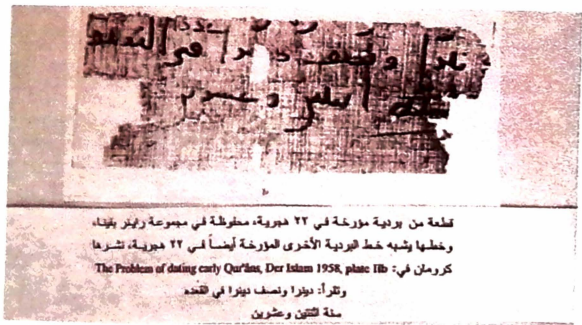
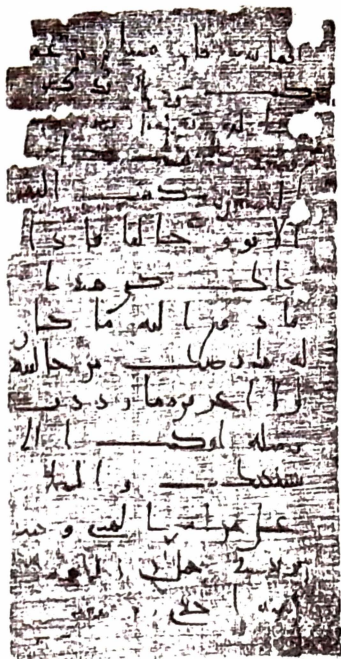


Fig. 8





شكل (٢١) ردية • مقام • التورخة ٩١٠هـ - مخطوط أوراق قردى المخطوط يدو الكتيب الصربية بالقاهرة.

Fig. 9



Fig. 10

However, we have to keep in mind the possibility that what is now called *Kufic* script, the forerunner of the *Hijāzī* script, is very rarely investigated, nor is its actual relationship to the *Nabaṭī* script (Fig 11-16).

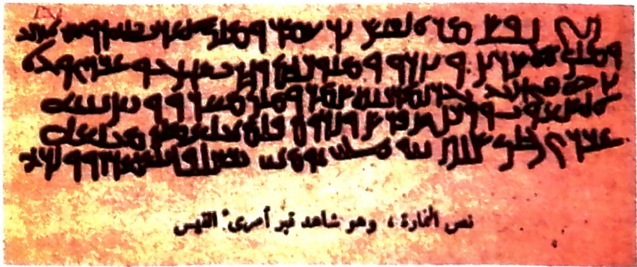


Fig.11

تي نفس مر القيس بر عمرو ملك العرب كله ذو أسر التيج وملك الأسدين ونزرو
وملوكلهم وهرب ملحقجو عكدي وجأ يزجي لي حبيج نجبرن مدينة شمر وملك
معدو ونزل بنه الشعوب ووكلهن فرسو لروم فلم يبلغ ملك مبلغه عكدي هلك
سنت 223 يوم 7 بكسلول بلسعد ذو ولده

Fig. 12

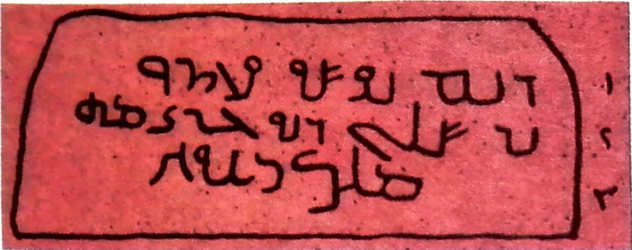
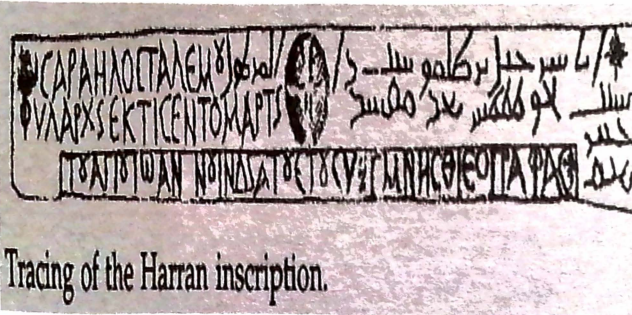


Fig. 13



Tracing of the Harran inscription.

Fig. 14

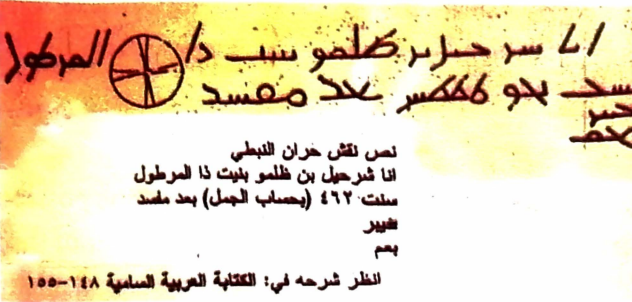
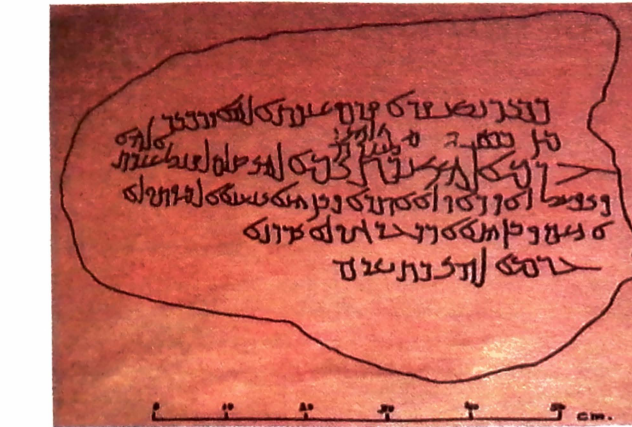


Fig. 15



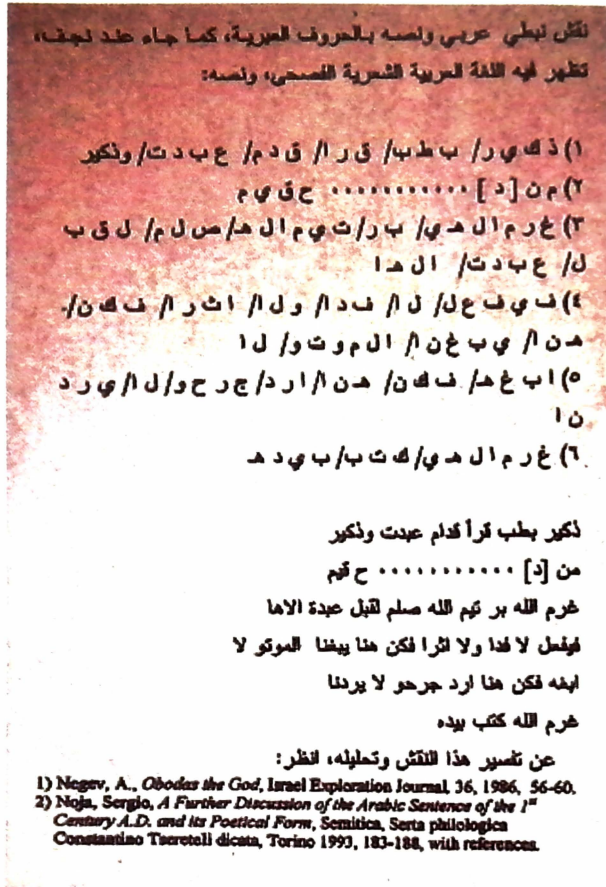


Fig. 16

This is in spite of hundreds of *Nabaṭī* inscriptions having been discovered and published in the last few years by prominent scholars at the Universities of Saudi Arabia, such as Sulaimān al-Thuyyib and 'Alī al-Ghabbān, who published "The inscription of Zuhayr, the oldest Islamic inscription dated 24/644-645"⁶⁶ together with some *Nabaṭī* inscriptions and early Islamic inscriptions (Fig 17-22).

Fig. 17



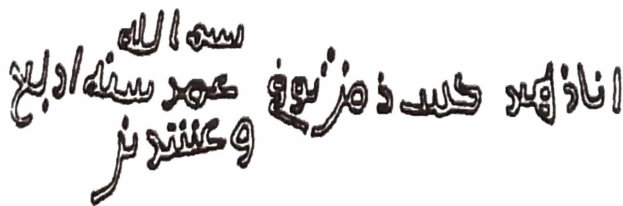
General photo of the Zuhayr inscriptions.

Fig. 18



Photo of the Zuhayr inscription.

Fig. 19



Tracing of the Zuhayr inscription

١ - بسم الله

Fig. 20

٢ - أنا زهير كتبت زمن توفي عمر سنة أربع

٣ - وعشرين

Reading of the Zuhayr inscription

Fig. 21

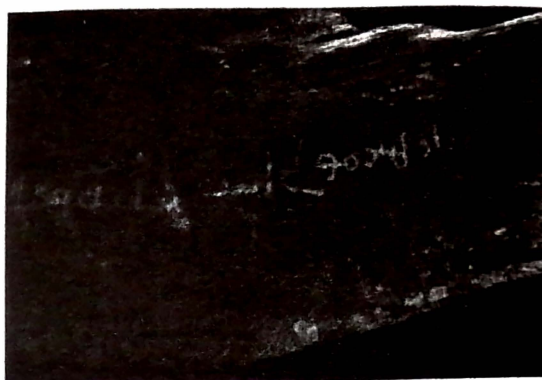


Photo of the second Zuhayr inscription.

Fig. 22

أنا زهير كتبت زمن توفي عمر سنة أربع وعشرين

Tracing of the second Zuhayr inscription.

In these the influence of the Kufic script is immediately detectable and can be easily discerned, at a time long before the Qur'ān was committed to writing.

Be that as it may, unless we possess a parchment with an explicit date, which is now next to impossible, all the opinions expressed in the various studies that have dealt with the Qur'ānic fragments, and that I was able to consult appear to me to be no more than mere hypothesis and conjecture, if not complete guesswork.

In this respect, one is tempted to investigate the results of the laboratories concerned, to ask if they tested the purity of the parchments before the C14 test to ascertain whether they had not actually been washed out thoroughly and professionally and then re-used. So far, no indication of this is to be found in their reports. The technique of obliterating a text in a document was not uncommon in Islam, as F. Deroche and others believed. Indeed, it was exercised by the Prophet himself during the Treaty of *Ḥudaybiyya*. The technique of erasing entire writings on parchments or paper, without leaving any trace of ink, was common practice when writing materials were scarce or expensive. Such a practice has been elaborated on in detail in a number of published and unpublished sources.⁶⁷ Al-Qāsim ibn Sallām reports that he saw in the *Imam* copy in Baghdad where the word *Qawārīr*, with an *alif* was erased *ḥukkat*, its place being clear to see. He adds: "I saw the word *salsalan* which has been *durisat* (nearly blotted out)."⁶⁸ On this point, we discuss below, as briefly as possible, three specimens from the San'ā palimpsests.

Nevertheless, without wishing to undervalue carbon dating, a keen palaeographer should consider every result of carbon dating very carefully and with the due caution it deserves, as we have already demonstrated.

How was the Qur'ān written down?

The Caliph 'Uthmān, who reigned from 644 until his death in 656,⁶⁹ ordered a committee to make a recension of the Qur'ān. Copies of the recension were dispatched to four or five of the *amsārs* or main cities, including Mecca, Kufa, Basra and Damascus.⁷⁰ No copy was sent to Egypt, which was

then under the governorship of 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ, who founded the Egyptian capital of Fuṣṭāṭ and built his own Mosque at its centre. The Caliph Uthmān retained one copy in Madina, known as the Imām copy, i.e. the Standard Codex.⁷¹

The actual procedure for writing the Qur'ānic text is reported by various sources. One of them informs us that:

"Uthmān chose Zayd ibn Thābit and ordered him to dictate the Qur'ān text to certain Quraishi individuals whom he chose. They wrote it exactly as people find it now in their hands."⁷²

We know that under the first Caliph, Abū Bakr, it was considered necessary to preserve the revelation in written form. Zayd ibn Thābit was the one commissioned with gathering the scattered verses and collecting them on sheets. These were later entrusted to Ḥafṣa bint 'Umar, the wife of the Prophet.

The Caliph 'Uthmān subsequently entrusted the same man to dictate the text from those sheets to the individuals he had chosen to write down the recensions. The question that leaps to mind is how the process of dictating was actually organized? In practical terms, let us imagine that Zayd ibn Thābit read the text to four or five individuals who wrote down what they heard. The result would seem obvious; each scribe would write down the text according to his own understanding of the words he was hearing. These would have been totally devoid of any vocalization or dotting and would have relied on the scribe's own choice of script. The early Qur'ān manuscripts were also totally devoid of any of the geometric or floral motifs, which were inserted within the palmette that separated the chapters, and the rosettes between the verses of later periods.

“The script in use at that time, the *Hijāzī* style, was deeply stamped by individual performance, and neither copyists, nor reader were uneasy with variations in its appearance when manuscripts were transcribed by various copyists.”⁷³

It is thus obvious that during the process of dictation some different spellings or even some minor omissions could unintentionally occur if collation (*‘arḍ, muqābala*) was not performed.

Although traditional accounts maintain that painstaking collation with the sheets was undertaken in order to ensure the authenticity of the text, the spelling variants were surely caused by the scribes using their own personal way of spelling certain words. It was therefore inevitable that some variants in their writing, due to the process of dictation used, would occur, which we call ‘graphic errors’. The ‘graphic errors’ together with the spelling variants committed by the scribes are called: *qirā’āt*, i.e. different readings. One or two words will suffice here to illustrate this point, for example: هيت or أف.⁷⁴ Being written without dots or diacritical signs, the last word هيت is said to be read in more than ten different ways.⁷⁵ Another simple example is the Qur’ānic word العالمين, which could be read with different pronunciations, if it was not orally transmitted.

In any case, all the ‘graphic errors’ and all the spelling variants have been thoroughly and minutely recorded and discussed by numerous Muslim scholars. We can, therefore, infer from this data that the Qur’ān orthography has been dealt with by the Muslim scholars themselves many centuries ago in their works on *Qirā’āt* and *Rasm al-Maṣāḥif*,⁷⁶ the different

readings and the orthography of the scripts of the Qur'ān. In other words, judging what the revisionists do, in fact, is trying to convince people of things that are false. The real purpose is glaringly obvious: to create the perception that the Qur'ān is not a work of divine revelation but man's creation. Such a notion constituted the objective of several revisionists, both in the past and in the present.

Nevertheless, over the course of time, the 'Uthmāni style of script underwent drastic changes in spite of the severe objections shown by early scholars like Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), who insisted like many others on keeping the *rasm* of the 'Uthmāni copies devoid of all dots, diacritic signs, and ornamentation.⁷⁷ It is obvious then that all copies of the Qur'ān written in the *Hijāzī* style of script which exhibit a diversity of dotting, or separation of *suras* or any ornamental decoration as a *sura* divider, do not belong to the 1st century at all. Mālik ibn Anas himself showed a copy of the Qur'ān belonging to his grandfather, Mālik ibn Abī 'Āmir al-Aṣḥabī (d. 74/693), who is said to have copied it during 'Uthmān's time, which did have a simple chain ornamentation (*silsila*) as a *sura* divider and some diacritical signs in ink,⁷⁸ but these must surely have been added at a later date, after ornamental decorations as *sura* dividers were slowly introduced into the blank spaces that separate the *suras* from each other in the 'Uthmānic Qur'āns.

As was inevitable, with the course of time the technique required for the production of better, more legible script was improved simultaneously by many scribes, such as Ibn Abī al-Hayyāj and al-Daḥḥāk ibn 'Ajlān at the end of the Umayyad and beginning of the Abbasid period. The culmination of this

change came with the advent of the Abbasid rule in Baghdad at the hands of Muqla⁷⁹ and his descendants, and later on by Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 413/1022), whose copies of the Qur'ān are now in Chester Beatty and in the Laleli Mosque in Istanbul, and of course by others earlier than him.

The fate of the Standard Codex

Now we turn our attention to the fate of the Standard Codex or the Imam copy. According to historical information we glean from various sources, some copies of the Caliph 'Uthmān's Qur'ān existed up until the middle of the 8th century Hijra or even much later.⁸⁰ Al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/837) had seen one of these copies in Baghdad. Al-Kindī (d. 236/850) mentions that in his time, three of the Caliph 'Uthmān's copies were destroyed by fire and war, but one of them was still kept at Malabja(?). The traveller Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217) mentions that he had seen a copy of the Qur'ān of Caliph 'Uthmān at the Mosque of Damascus in 580 AH. Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Marrākishī reported extensively on *al-Muṣḥaf al-Imām* in al-Andalus and Morocco.⁸¹ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372) mentions that he had seen a copy of Caliph 'Uthmān's Qur'ān in Damascus, which was brought there from Palestine in 518 AH. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (d. 779/1377) reports that he had seen copies of the 'Uthmān Qur'āns in Basra, Granada and Marrakesh. Al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) mentions that in the year 517/1123, the preacher of the Mosque showed the Fatimid Caliph al-Āmir a copy of the Qur'ān transcribed by 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.⁸² He also discusses three copies of Caliph 'Uthmān's Qur'ān, two of them at the 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ Mosque in Cairo and the third at the Fādiliyyah Madrasa in the city.⁸³

All of these reports depend exclusively on hearsay and rumours rather than on factual evidence because none of them so far has reached us. However, one eyewitness narrates that in the year 223/837, during the reign of al-Mu'taṣim (833–842), he saw in Baghdad the Imam copy of the Qur'ān, meaning the Caliph 'Uthmān's own copy, with some blood stains scattered on its pages. He states that the length of each page was two *shibrs* and four fingers (approximately 45 centimetres) with 28 lines to a page.⁸⁴

If we take this report at face value, we can conclude that this codex is certainly not related to any of Marcel's fragments, as each of its pages has 25 lines of text; or to the Paris fragments, for which the number of lines varies from 18 to 21 to 30 lines per page; or to the codex discovered by Bernhard Moritz in the Egyptian delta with 20 lines of text to the page;⁸⁵ or to the folios found in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, which were kept for a long time in a deposit for worn out manuscripts in the mosque and eventually brought to Istanbul in 1911, before the fall of the Ottoman rule, with 21 to 26 lines to the page;⁸⁶ or to the folio auctioned by Christie's with 30 lines to the page; or the palimpsest auctioned by Sotheby's in 1992 with 24 lines to the page; or any other fragment we know of. That is to say: none of the existing parchments, including the Birmingham fragment, match in any possible way any part of the 'Uthmānic copy. Unfortunately, we still lack any explicit evidence concerning the size or the dimension of the copies which the commission wrote; neither the number of lines on any page, nor the arrangements of the *suras*, except what al-Nadīm reported about the arrangement of the *suras* in 'Ubay ibn Ka'b and Ibn Mas'ūd's copies, which were not part and parcel of the copies dispatched by 'Uthmān to the various cities.

The great size of those copies with between 600 to 1000⁸⁷ folios each, was problematic for the scribes, who resorted to dividing their copies into *ajzā'*, *aḥzāb* (portions, sections)⁸⁸ in order to ease the burden on the reader of carrying the bulky copy.

A few problems still remained to be solved. The first one is to do with the French Campaign in Egypt and Syria (1798–1801) which had some bearing on the acquisition of the Qur'ān folios now scattered in various custodies, including the Birmingham parchments. The British slogan 'divide and rule' was immediately adopted by Napoleon, when he addressed the Egyptian people in his infamous Proclamation of July 1798:

"People of Egypt: You will be told by our enemies, that I come to destroy your religion. Believe them not. Tell them that I come to restore your rights, punish your usurpers, and raise the true worship of Mahomet. Tell them that I venerate more than do the Mamelukes, God, His prophet, and the Koran. Tell them that all men are equal in the sight of God; that wisdom, talents, and virtue alone constitute the difference between them. And what are the virtues which distinguish the Mamelukes that entitle them to appropriate all the enjoyments of life to themselves? If Egypt is their farm, let them show their lease, from God, by which they hold it. Is there a fine estate? It belongs to the Mamelukes. Is there a beautiful slave, a fine horse, a good house? All belong to the Mamelukes. But God is just and merciful, and He hath ordained that the Empire of the Mamelukes shall come to an end. O you; sheikhs, judges, imams, charbachiyya and distinguished men, tell your folk that the French are true Muslims as well."

Although the original text, which I inspected, was full of stylistic and grammatical mistakes, it was certainly not written by Napoleon but by a French Arabist, most probably by Marcel himself. At any rate, when Napoleon first set foot in Cairo, he formed a special council (*diwān*) to govern the capital; a council that consisted of nine Sheikhs, under the chairmanship of Sheikh 'Abdullah al-Sharqāwī, the Rector of al-Azhar Mosque at that time. The rector of al-Azhar himself tells us the following:

“When the French soldiers entered al-Azhar mosque, they spread out the books of al-Azhar libraries and began to search them, thinking there is some gold hidden in them. The Jews who were their translators and interpreters took with them many manuscripts and precious *maṣāḥif* (Qur'āns).”⁸⁹

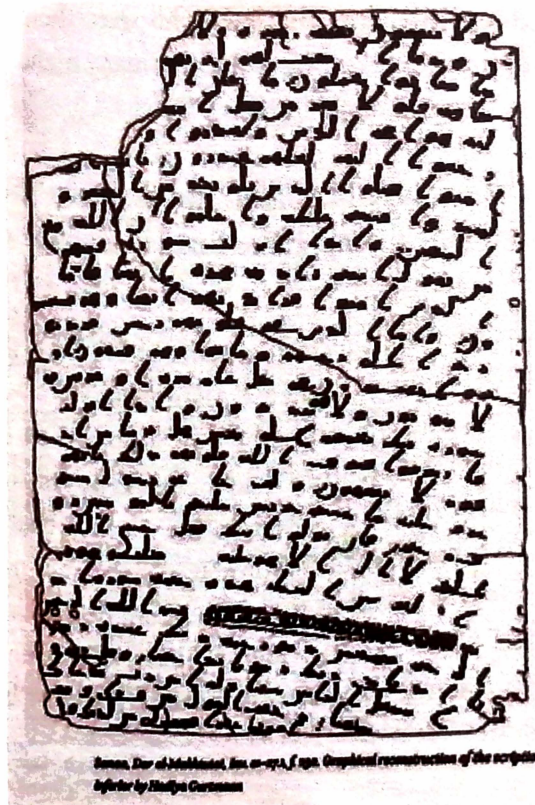
The question may be raised: did they buy them from the Rector or just steal them? The Russian website of J.J. Marcel reports that:

“The Marcel collection contains about 2000 parchment leaves forming 130 items. All of them were acquired by Marcel in the Mosque of 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ in Old Cairo (Fustat) where they had been 'kept' buried in the ground. It was a custom to bury books that went out of use due to deterioration. It is then quite natural that the leaves found in such burials are not usually in very good physical condition and have often been stained, torn, eaten by rodents, scorched by fire, or bear damp patches.”⁹⁰

This report, if it is correct, together with the Rector's report, certainly confirms my assumption, mentioned above, that the Fustat fragments which Marcel acquired, were not bought as F. Deroche tries to convince us⁹¹, but were simply stolen from both mosques. It is a form of plunder by stealth.

The other problem which deserves our attention here is the palimpsests of San'a, which have been the subject of much debate among Western and Neo-Westernized revisionists⁹², including the discoverer of the Birmingham parchments, who devoted several papers to them, published in various European Bulletins.⁹³

Fig. 23



There is something fishy about the whole debate, but a graphical transcription was finally made of one of the San'a palimpsests by Hadiya Gurtmann, now available on the internet. When I compared Hadiya Gurtmann's graphical reconstruction of the San'a palimpsest (inv.01-27.1 fol. 23a) with the actual text of the Qur'an, I found that the folio contains part of Aya 122 up to Aya 130 of *Sūrat al-Tawba*. At the end, there appears a sentence of 4 words which can be read: *هذه خاتمة سورة التوبة* (This is the end of *Sūrat al-Tawba*), followed by a crude ornament separating the two *suras*. Next begins Aya 1 until Aya 4 of *Sūrat Maryam*, with the *basmala* on two lines. Her reconstruction contains 3 or 4 vertical or semi vertical dots in certain places, and some reading errors committed by the lady herself, which are understandable when it comes to deciphering a palimpsest, because the erasure was incomplete. In spite of the radiocarbon dating, the crude ornament and the dots between the *ayat* indicate that it belongs to the 2nd/8th century but not earlier.

The whole text tallies verbatim with the Qur'an. The only difference is the sequence of the arrangement, which does not tally with either the *Muṣḥaf* of Ibn Mas'ūd or with the *Muṣḥaf* of 'Ubay ibn Ka'b⁹⁴ as reported by al-Nadīm and al-Bāqillānī.⁹⁵ Thus the claim of Sadighi and Goudarzi that there is a broad agreement with 'Ubay's codex,⁹⁶ is null and void. Moreover, Sadighi and Bergmann emphasize the fact that:

"In the codices of Ibn Mas'ūd and 'Ubay ibn Ka'b, the *suras* are arranged in different order relative to one another; but, within the *suras*, the codices generally have the same arrangement of sentences as the standard Qur'an."⁹⁷

Strange! How did they know that??? If the order of the *suras* here differs from the standard text, the different sequence was duly recorded and fully discussed by Muslim scholars more than ten centuries ago, to such an extent that al-Bāqillānī (d.403/1012) declared that, regarding the arrangement of the *suras*, there exists no explicit prohibition nor is it divinely inspired.⁹⁸

This fact is corroborated by the findings in the San'a trove of Qur'āns, with an arrangement of *suras* different from the Qur'ānic text we have today. The 2nd fragment of the San'a palimpsest (Fig 24) shows two layers of script. Both scripts are of the *Hijāzī* type. Firstly, a dark brown script contains part of *Sūrat Tāha* (20), from *Aya* 1 up to part of *Aya* 9, with some parts of the text missing on both edges. In the second layer we can discern some traces of a light brown script, which was deliberately, but not thoroughly, washed out of the parchment, so that it could be reused. It is to be noted that both layers display verse separators, which look like simple geometric point patterns: two parallel lines crossing the page from right to left, with some patterns between them, clearly to be recognized in the original script of the palimpsest.

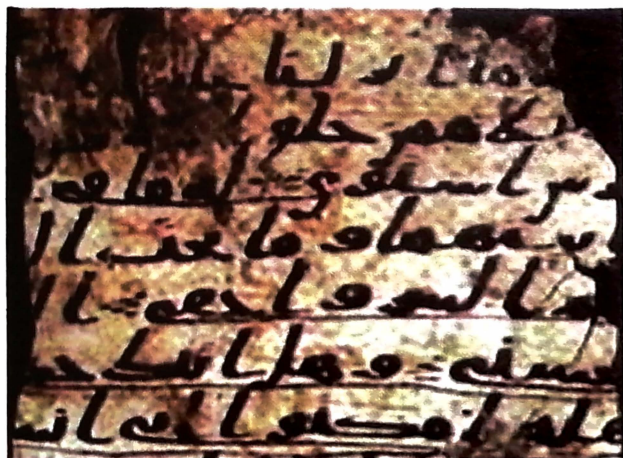


Fig. 24

Although the parchment has not so far been reconstructed, from a palaeographic point of view it is clear that both layers belong to a period that lies between 110/728 and 150/767, if not later, but definitely not earlier.

The recycling of parchments

The recycling of parchments was not an uncommon phenomenon in the Islamic tradition⁹⁹ as it was in every civilization in times of scarcity and high demand. The San'ā palimpsests were not a unique case, in spite of the fact that the San'ā collection itself included several other palimpsests with later dates.

During the turmoil that erupted between al-Amin and al-Ma'mun in Baghdad in the 2nd/8th century, all the parchments of the chancelleries (*dawāwīn*) were plundered and looted by mobs, washed out and sold to be used again.¹⁰⁰ The Syriac Galen Palimpsest of the 3rd/9th century is another example,¹⁰¹ as is the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* of Abū'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356 AH), which was written on palimpsests, when it was sold in an auction in Baghdad.¹⁰²

We must point out here that by using the term “washed out”, it does not imply that water was used to remove the ink from the parchment, but rather other means already explained in my own book.¹⁰³ Otherwise the parchments shrink as water makes them revert to rawhide and become rippled (corrugated).

Moreover, Western historians record that when the Muslims conquered Sicily, southern Italy and southern Spain during the last part of the 1st/7th century they found Latin and Greek books. They first translated them into Arabic

and then washed the parchments out and reused them for writing Arabic books. When those parts were regained by the Christians, the Arabic writings on those parchments had been completely wiped out. It is only in recent years that the Latin and Greek texts have been able to be retrieved from the old palimpsests with the Arabic layer still in them.¹⁰⁴

The crux of the whole matter which has puzzled the revisionists is why were the parchments which had a Qur'ānic text washed out and another Qur'ānic text written on them? One of them argues:

“Why the older layer was wiped out cannot be said definitely until it can be read in detail. But there is hardly any other explanation for this replacement of a Qur'ānic text by another one other than that the older text version might have scandalized theologians or other people in power or charge.”¹⁰⁵

F. Deroche thinks that:

“The codex San'a 1 illustrates the weight of the economy versus the ideological perspective: during the second/eight century, its owner(s) may have decided to recycle the parchment and have a copy conforming with the mainstream text rather than destroying costly material. It is perfectly natural on the other hand that the parchment with an erased Qur'ānic text could have been used for a copy of the Qur'ān.”¹⁰⁶

Do we see any difference between the idea expressed by each of these? F. Deroche seems to have forgotten the historical incident that he himself quotes about 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān,

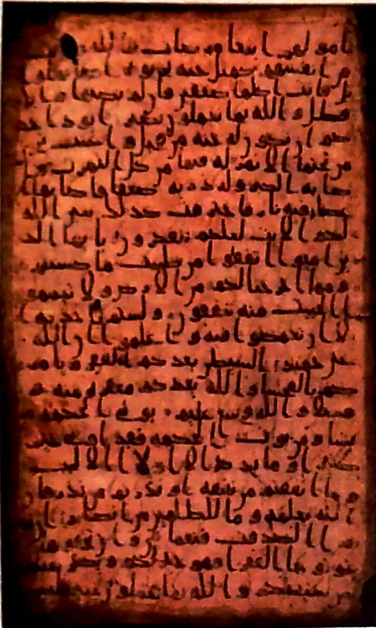
who was then the Ummayyad governor of Egypt. He had his own copy of the Qur'ān made for his private use.¹⁰⁷ He then offered a prize for whoever could find a scribal mistake in it. One of the reciters eventually found just one scribal mistake, and Ibn Marwān ordered the whole folio to be replaced.¹⁰⁸

This incident has not caused any revisionist to contemplate the fact that the copy of 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Marwān (d. 85/704) was thoroughly collated in the year 76/695¹⁰⁹ with the text of the Qur'ān that the reciter had fully memorised, thereby allowing him to discover the solitary scribal mistake: *naj'a* in place of *na'ja*.¹¹⁰

Now what happened to the folio he replaced? As it is customary in both the Jewish and Islamic traditions to keep any material containing a sacred text in a geniza-like deposit, we can speculate that this costly parchment would have been washed out and re-used for other purposes, or discarded and kept in a geniza-like deposit with other discarded parchments until they were stolen by someone and sold to the German antiquarian Erik von Scherling in Leiden, to subsequently end up in a European Library.

The article dealing with the Stanford palimpsest¹¹¹ (Fig 25-26) merits some comment here. Palaeographically speaking, although it appears the same to the naked eye, the thickness of the ink in the nib of the scribe's reed or quill varies from the beginning of the word, or even the letter, to the end of it. In fact, the end of the stroke appears faintly coloured under a magnifying glass or under an ultraviolet beam or an X-ray. Therefore, it is almost impossible to discern the entire word, let alone the page of the first layer, if it is washed out thoroughly. What remains under an X-ray or any other technical devices is

a skeleton of some hollow images that need to be re-inked, to make them visible and consequently readable. This is exactly what happened with the Stanford palimpsest.



Stanford '07, recto.

Fig. 25



Stanford '07, verso.

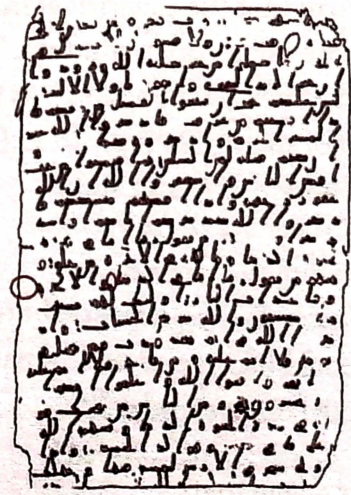
Fig. 26

To begin with: the re-inking, or as they call it: “hand drawn tracing”, and the reconstruction of the text from the image tracing photo, by one of the contributors or by both, is visible on both sides of the parchment. The graphic of re-inking on both sides is notoriously incorrect, because it is extremely difficult to observe the first layer, as the letters are erased either partly or wholly and covered by the second layer. Moreover, this particular palimpsest has been described as a pre-‘Uthmānic copy. The carbon dating of this palimpsest is not conclusive by the very testimony of the authors themselves, who wrote:

“The results (of carbon dating) indicate that the parchment has a 68% probability of belonging to the

period between 614 to 656 CE. It has a 95% probability of belonging to the period between 578 and 669 CE.”¹¹²

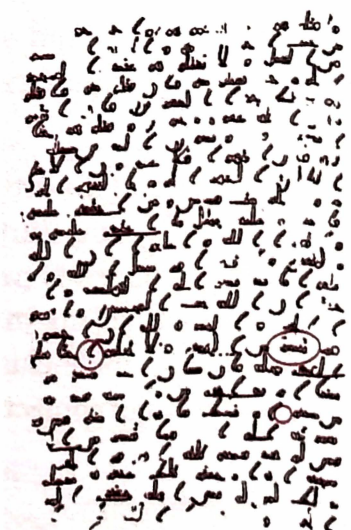
Fig.
27



Stanford '07, lower text, verso. Kor 2, 197-202; or by the folio's own numbering, Kor 2, 194-202.

الْحَمْدُ أَشْهَرُ تَعْلَمُونَ قَسَمْتُ لَكُمْ بِمَنْ يَخْلُقُ هَذِهِ الْقُرْآنَ
وَقَدْ تَرَكْتُ لَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ مَا تَرَكْتُ لَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ
وَأَقْرَبُ بَيْنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ
أَنْ تَتَّبِعُوا الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ اللَّهُ مِنْ الْقُرْآنِ الْحَسَنِ
وَأَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَتَّبِعُوا الْقُرْآنَ
الْقَاسِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ اللَّهُ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
وَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ الْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ
وَقَدْ تَرَكْتُ لَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ مَا تَرَكْتُ لَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ
وَأَقْرَبُ بَيْنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ
أَنْ تَتَّبِعُوا الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ اللَّهُ مِنْ الْقُرْآنِ الْحَسَنِ
وَأَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَتَّبِعُوا الْقُرْآنَ
الْقَاسِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ اللَّهُ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
وَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ الْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ

Fig.
28



Stanford '07, lower text, recto. Kor 2, 191-6; or by the folio's own numbering, Kor 2, 188-93.

وَأَقْرَبُ بَيْنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ
أَنْ تَتَّبِعُوا الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ اللَّهُ مِنْ الْقُرْآنِ الْحَسَنِ
وَأَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَتَّبِعُوا الْقُرْآنَ
الْقَاسِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ اللَّهُ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
وَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ الْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ
وَقَدْ تَرَكْتُ لَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ مَا تَرَكْتُ لَكُمْ فِي الْقُرْآنِ
وَأَقْرَبُ بَيْنَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ
أَنْ تَتَّبِعُوا الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ اللَّهُ مِنْ الْقُرْآنِ الْحَسَنِ
وَأَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَتَّبِعُوا الْقُرْآنَ
الْقَاسِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ اللَّهُ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ
قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ عَزَائِكُمْ قَدْ أَفْضَلْتُ مِنْ
وَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ الْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ وَالْقُرْآنُ

Furthermore, in the same article, they acknowledged that the inks used in the two layers were chemically different. This made it possible to determine in which layer every feature belonged. It was possible to confirm that the diacritical marks and verse dividers were in the same ink as the main text. This holds true for both the lower and upper text. The same is true of the decorative *sura* separators of the lower text; therefore, these features were probably not added at a later stage.

F. Deroche rightly observes that:

“If Sadighi and Bergmann’s finding about short vowel marks is correct, it could become an additional argument for a late date for the original codex.”¹¹³

Sadighi and Bergmann further allege that:

“the San’ā.1 manuscript was produced no more than 15 years after the death of Prophet Muḥammad.”¹¹⁴

F. Deroche, on his part, politely overlooks the other features said to exist in the text. The question is: do we find such features in ‘Uthmānic copies, let alone pre-‘Uthmānic ones? That is if we have one at hand!

This proves beyond any possible doubt that all the articles of Sadighi and his associates do not deserve any further comment, and the orthography of all the palimpsests needs a more thorough and objective investigation. To my mind, all the studies, without exception, remain inconclusive, containing no more than tentative hypotheses and conjecture, based on no solid evidence.

Other Options

Interestingly enough, the revisionists never consider any other logical or practical options for the existence of the palimpsests other than what they have already preconceived. For example:

1. Is it not possible that the scribe might have discovered some scribal mistakes or omissions while he was collating the text, either from his memory or from an alternative text, and decided to wash the whole folio out and re-write another, correct version, on top of it, instead of wasting this costly and valuable parchment? This is attested to by the fact that all the palimpsests contain points where the text varies from the standard Qur'ān, i.e. they were all discarded for one reason or another and then re-used.

2. Is it not plausible that a scribe might have been in urgent need of some parchment to continue writing a copy and found some discarded folios with scribal mistakes or omissions, which he then washed out and re-used? Sadighi and Goudarzi suggest various explanations for the recycling of the palimpsest:

“The first one relies on the hypothesis that the palimpsest was worn out, but judging from the folios which have come down to us, the state of the parchment is quite satisfactory. Of course parts of it may have been more damaged, either as a result of intensive use or by accident. But this would not entail the erasure of the entire manuscript”¹¹⁵

This is unless it contained scribal mistakes or omissions. This is again attested to by the fact that

this sheet was one of the discarded parchments with scribal mistakes or omissions and was re-used by another scribe, in spite of its bad state and condition.

3. Is it not probable that those palimpsests, though few in number, amongst the thousands of parchments in the San'a trove, contained scribal mistakes or some other omissions, and were merely discarded, but not burnt or destroyed, because they contained a holy text? And is it not possible that these sheets were then washed out by needy scribes, many of whom may not have been able to afford buying new ones?

All these hypotheses are clearly validated by the omission of certain words on both sides of the Stanford palimpsest 7, as they are clearly full of illegible re-inking and missing words. An example of this is the missing word حسنة in line 14, where we find:

ربنا آتنا في الدنيا.... وفي الآخرة.... وقنا عذاب النار.

“O Lord give us in this world... and in the hereafter...”

The question is: give us what???

Another example is the missing word رؤوسكم in line 17: “And do not shave...until...” The question is: shave what??? Or the missing two words من صدقة in line 20.

It is just like saying in the Bible: O Lord give us this day our daily... and forgive... our debts (bread... us). The question is: give us what???

In any case, this is clear evidence that the discovery of such omissions by the scribe prompted him to discard the folio, for it to be washed out and re-used by another needy scribe for some other text of the Qur’ān. This totally contradicts

their scheme to prove that this palimpsest represents a pre-'Uthmānic version of the Qur'ān, which it definitely is not.

The reality is that this palimpsest is one of those parchments discarded due to either wear and tear or scribal errors and omissions, set aside to be re-used by someone who urgently needed them when writing materials were either scarce or expensive.

It is even acknowledged by the authors that, all of its features were probably not added at a later stage, i.e. the decorative *sura* separators of the lower text. Indeed they had to admit the obvious; and we know that this is a feature not found in the 'Uthmānic Qur'ān, as we have already seen, let alone a pre-'Uthmānic Qur'ān.

The contradictions of one of the revisionists can be seen in at least one sentence, when he remarks:

“It would be naive to accept all such reports as reliable descriptions of Companion codices; but Sana’l proves it equally unwise to dismiss them all as unreliable.”¹¹⁶

This is plainly a muddled way of thinking; a common phenomenon that can be clearly observed in all their publications without exception.

Summing up the whole Episode

Whatever the outcome of the radiocarbon datings, I still strongly maintain that the Birmingham parchments, with all the distinctive features in them: the script, dotting, using golden and red ink as well as the separation of *ayāt* and *suras*... etc, point to the end of the 2nd/8th and the beginning of the 3rd/9th century, but not earlier. Likewise, all the parchments

so far studied by the revisionists in their various essays and publications, belong in their entirety to the 2nd/8th century if not later, but definitely not earlier.

Examining the Parchments of Birmingham

My conviction became even stronger when I personally inspected and examined the two folios thoroughly in the Birmingham Library, on the 23rd November 2016 under strict conditions imposed on me by the two ladies at the Library, to such a degree that I was adamantly refused permission either to touch them, even with rubber gloves, or examine the quality of the ink.

The result of my examination can be summed up in the following words: the two folios appeared to me to be palimpsests which were thoroughly and professionally washed out and which then had another text of the Qur'ān transcribed onto them. The structure of the parchments, when examined under my own microscope, did not appear to be older than the script itself. The two folios seemed to have been coated with a rather thin layer of Arabic Gum, which shines under ultraviolet light. I could not determine the date when this was applied. In addition, the dotting of some letters like the *thā'*, the *shīn*, the *nūn* and others, as well as some diacritical signs, like the *fatha* over some letters and five oblong dots separating the *āyāt*, indicate beyond any reasonable doubt that the folios indeed belong to the date I have already specified earlier.

Be that as it may, one positive point that emerges through all the fuss of the media disinformation, and despite all the opinions expressed by so called 'Qur'ān experts', is that David Thomas, Professor of Christianity and Islam at the University

of Birmingham, has admitted that:

“These portions must have been in a form that is very close to the form of the Koran read today, supporting the view that the text has undergone little or no alteration and that it can be dated to a point very close to the time it was believed to be revealed.”¹¹⁷

In other words, the text of the Qur'ān we possess today has never been altered or tampered with, since it was actually revealed to the Prophet of Islam. This is attested to by the fact that the whole text on the parchments tally verbatim with the Qur'ān we possess today.

Finally, The University of Birmingham's scheme to persuade rich students to flock to its gates – or as Professor David Thomas, declared in the *New York Times*: “The discovery could make Birmingham a draw for Muslims and scholars” – has surely now altogether failed, because all the frenzied propaganda was not based on any solid evidence, but rather on sheer fictitious myth.

Professor Dr. Q. Al-Samarrai

Leiden - The Netherlands

Endnotes

1 It is reported by al-Mas'ūdi, (*Murūj al-Dhahab* 2/390) that during the battle of *Ṣiffin* in the year 37 AH/657 CE about 500 copies of the Qur'ān were lifted up on lances.

2 Cf. The very informative article: "Radiocarbon (Carbon-14) Dating And The Qur'ānic Manuscripts", on: www.islamicawareness.org. First Composed: 21st May 2006, Last Modified: 7th April 2015.

3 Matt McGrath, Environment Correspondent, BBC News, 21 July 2015, based on Dr. Graven's research which has been published in the journal, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Dr Heather Graven - Imperial College London, see her research on: www.imperial.ac.uk/people/h.graven.

4 "Radiocarbon (Carbon-14) Dating and The Qur'ānic Manuscripts".

5 He uses the term 'defective script', meaning: devoid of all diacritical signs, dotting or punctuations. Most western palaeographers are fond of using Latin terms like: *scriptio defectiva* (which is writing in a Semitic alphabet that contains no vowel points) and *scriptio continua* (which is a style of writing without spaces or other marks between the words or sentences).

6 Gerd-R. Puin, *Methods of Research on Qur'ānic Manuscripts-A few Ideas*, p.9.

7 Fred Donner, "The Historical Context" in McAuliffe, J. D. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 31–33.

8 See the article by A.R. Momin, *Al-Muṣḥaf Al-Sharīf, The IOS Minaret*, an online Islamic Magazine, vol,7, Issue 07-8, 16 August, p. 17-18, mentioning the Vidas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Vestal of the Zoroastrians.

9 Al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Cairo 1957, 3/453. "The Imām Codex was totally devoid of all diacritical signs, dotting or punctuations."

10 In the *Comprehensive Catalogue of Arab Islamic Manuscripts of the Aāl-al-Bayt Institute –Amman* 1986, we find that the number of

complete registered copies is 2846 belonging to the period spanning the 1st-14th Islamic century. Some of these bear a date, while others bear some suggestive clue (*qarīna*) indicating their date. There are also 1360 complete copies without a date, 1751 incomplete copies with a date, and 2377 copies without a date.

11 It has 1087 folios, and it weighs 80 kilograms.

12 T. Altıkulaç, *Al-Muṣḥaf Al-Sharīf: Attributed To Uthmān Bin Affān* (The Copy At The Topkapi Palace Museum), 2007, Organization of the Islamic Conference Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture: Istanbul, Turkey.

13 Ibrahim Jum'a, *Dirāsa fī Taṭawwur al-Kitābāt al-Kūfiyya 'alā al-Aḥjār fī Miṣr fī al-Qurūn al-Khamsa Al-Ūlā li-Hijra, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī*, Cairo n.d., p, 74, quoting J. Morier, Pope and Sarre.

دراسة في تطور الكتابات الكوفية على الأحجار في مصر في القرون الخمسة الأولى للهجرة

14 Cf. W. Hatch, *An Album of dated Syriac Manuscripts*, Boston 1946, plates X, XXX and XL, 518 CE, 569 CE and 613-614 CE respectfully, referred to by F. Deroche in his *Qur'āns of the Umayyads*, p. 99.

15 *Qur'āns of the Umayyads*, A First Overview, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2014, p. 6.

16 عبد الله بن مسعود بن غافل، بمجعة وفاء، ابن حبيب الهذلي أبو عبد الرحمن، من السابقين الأولين، ومن كبار علماء الصحابة، مناقبه جمة، أتمه عمره على الكوفة، مات سنة اثنتين وثلاثين بالمدينة. (التقريب ١ / ٤٥٠).

17 See for instance: *al-Intiṣār li-l-Qur'ān* of al-Bāqilānī, Amman 2001, 1/318.

18 Alba Fedeli is a Lecturer in Arabic at the University of Milan (Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy). Her studies, started under her late supervisor, Sergio Noja, have focused on the oldest Qur'anic manuscripts, and she has now obtained her PhD from the University of Birmingham.

19 www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-3343602

20 www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/scholars-split-by-claim-that-koran-scrap-rewrites-story-of-islam-10487474.html

21 Born in 1772 in Cherbourg, died in 1822 in Cairo.

22 See David S. Powers, *Muhammad is Not the Father of any of your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2009), p. 166.

23 There was no British Library then, only the British Museum.

24 <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-35151643>.

25 Alphonse Mingana, who died in 1937 in Birmingham, purchased them from the German antiquarian dealer in Leiden E. von Scherling in 1936, a year before his death.

26 <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-35151643>.

27 A. Fedeli, "The Provenance of The Manuscript Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572: Dispersed Folios From A Few Qur'anic Quires", *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 2011, Volume 17, Number 1, pp. 45-56. "In 2011 a detailed study regarding the history and provenance of this manuscript was made by Alba Fedeli who established that M. 1572 comprised two distinct manuscripts. Folios 1 and 7, namely Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a, belonged to the same codex as Arabe 328c and the remaining seven folios, 2-6, 9, namely Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572b, belonged to the same codex as Marcel 17 (National Library of Russia) and Ms. 67 [Museum of Islamic Art, Doha-Qatar]." She was also involved in 2007 in (David and Bohams) parchments of Copenhagen. See what B. Sadighi and U. Bergmann wrote about her stupidity in; *Arabica*, 2010, p.363.

28 A. Fedeli, "Relevance of The Oldest Qur'anic Manuscripts For The Readings Mentioned By Commentaries. A Note On Sura 'Tā-Ha'", *Manuscripta Orientalia*, 2009, Volume 15, Number. 1, pp. 3-10.

29 www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-33436021

30 <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-35151643>.

31 *Al-Jazeera* as an Arabic outlet has propagated the same false information about the Berlin fragments by a reporter called: Khalid Schmit.

32 Maarten Keulemans 22 juli 2015.

33 In the issue of Wednesday 22 July 2015, stating that the announcement has made media waves around the world.

34 Where it claims that: The announcement was made last week sparking a frenzy of interest around the world.

35 <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-35151643>.

36 Carbon-dating of a fragment of text kept at Birmingham University provokes unholy row, by Cahal Milmo, Saturday 05 September 2015.

37 For Keith Small's more considered views of the Birmingham Qur'ān Folios, see the following:

www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/keith-small/birmingham-quran_b_8101734.html

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/keith-small/the-birmingham-koran-extr_b_8872936.html

38 Op.cit.

39 See what al-Momini wrote about the history of the Old and the New Testaments in *Al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharif*.

40 Russ Wellen, <http://fpif.org/authors/russ-wellen>), July 29, 2015.

41 A. Shebunin, "Kuficheskii Koran Imp. SPB. Publichnoi Biblioteki", *Zapiski Vostochnago Otdieleniia Imperatorskago Russkago Arkheologicheskago Obshchestva*, 1891, pp. 69-133.

42 S. Pissareff, *Coran Coufique de Samarcand: écrit d'après la Tradition de la Propre Main du Troisième Calife Osman (644-656)* qui se trouve dans la Bibliothèque Impériale Publique de St. Petersburg, 1905, St. Petersburg.

43 A comparative study of religious scriptures indicates the existence of countless textual variations, inconsistencies and interpolations. The Old Testament texts themselves attest to the fact of tampering and manipulation in the Jewish scriptures (Isaiah 5:24; Jeremiah 36:23). Between 700 and 70 BC, the Temple of Solomon was destroyed several times. The Torah, which used to be kept in the Temple, was often burned by kings and emperors like Nebuchadnezzar and Titus. However, it is believed that each time the Torah was burned, the Hebrew prophets reproduced and revived it from memory. Scholars of the Old Testament point out that these texts have been altered by

countless editors and scribes. Similarly, the New Testament texts are not free from variations and errors. The Codex Sinaiticus, the oldest manuscript of the Christian texts, has two books (Shepherd of Hermas, written in Rome in the 2nd century, and the Epistle of Barnabas) which are missing from the Authorized Version of the Bible. Furthermore, certain crucial verses relating to the Resurrection are not to be found in the Codex Sinaiticus. Some years ago, German scholars collected the Greek manuscripts of the gospels from all over the world and found, after careful study, that there were 200,000 variants in the texts.

44 *Geschichte des Qorans*, Göttingen 1860.

45 Mingana was born in 1878 and died in 1937 in Birmingham. He worked with Lewis when he was only 27 years old.

46 Leaves from three ancient Qur'ans, possibly pre-Othmanic, Cambridge 1914. Dealing with palimpsests.

47 Died on 10th June 2002. He was an American historian who taught at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. His line of thought was followed by Michael Cook, Patricia Crone, Martin Hinds, Gerald Hawting, Christoph Luxenberg, Gerd-R. Puin, Andrew Rippin, the Egyptian Nasr Abū Zayd and many others.

48 *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World*, 1977.

49 "Is The Qur'ān The Word of God?" on the internet.

50 See for instance:

- (1) ديوان عمرو بن قبيصة 81: دارسا آياتها نخط الكتاب
- (2) المفضليات 54 المرقش الأكبر: الدارقفر والرسوم كما رقص في ظهر الأديم قلم
- (3) المفضليات 25: لمن الديار عفون بالحبس آياتها كهارق الفرس
- (4) عبد الله بن عَمَّة الضبي: فلم يبق إلا دمنة ومنازل كما رد في خط الدواة مدادها
- (5) معود الحكماء معاوية بن مالك: من الأجزاء أسفل من نُمِل كما رجعت بالقلم الكتابا
- (6) زهير بن أبي سلمى: بَلَيْنَ وَتَحَسَّبَ آيَاتَهُنَّ مِنْ فَرَطٍ حَوْلَيْنِ رَقًا مُجِيلًا
- (7) حاتم الطائي: أتعرف أطلالاً ونوياً مهدماً تخطك في رَقٍ كُتِبَ مِنْمِنَّا
- (8) طرفة بن العبد: كسطور الرق رقصه بالضحي مرقشُ يَشْمُهُ

(9) أبو ذؤيب الهذلي: عرفت الديار كرقم الدوا.....ة يُزِيرُهَا الْكَاتِبُ الْحَمِيرِي

(10) عدي بن زيد: ما تبين العين من آياتها غير نوي مثل خط بالقلم

(11) لها أخاديد من آثار ساكنها ... كما تزدد في قرطاسه القلم

51 Sumac is a shrub yielding leaves which are dried and ground for use in tanning and dyeing.

52 D. Hunter, *Papermaking through Eighteen Centuries*, N.Y. 1943, p. 14.

53 D. Hunter, *Papermaking – The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft*, 2nd ed. N.Y. 1947, p.447.

54 Sizing is used in papermaking and textile manufacturing to change the absorption and wear characteristics of those materials; it is the term used for oil-based surface preparation for gilding (and is also known as mordant in this context). It is used by painters and artists to prepare paper and textile surfaces for certain art techniques. Sizing also refers to the process of including or applying the substance.

55 <https://c14.arch.ox.ac.uk/dating.html>

56 Op.cit.

57 <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-35151643>.

58 The SL-1, or Stationary Low-Power Reactor Number One, was a United States Army experimental nuclear power reactor which underwent a steam explosion and meltdown on January 3, 1961, killing its three operators.

59 Cf. Matt McGrath Environment correspondent, BBC News, 21 July 2015, based on Dr. Graven's research which was published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Dr Heather Graven - Imperial College London, see her research in: www.imperial.ac.uk/people/h.graven.

60 <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-climatechange-carbon-idUKKCN0WN1QR>

61 Op.cit.

62 <http://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFLSN16Q2FD>, written by Alister Doyle.

63 *Qur'āns of the Umayyads, A First Overview*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2014, pp.15, 94.

64 Op.cit.

65 See the very informative study: *Dirāsa fī Taṭawwur al-Kitābāt al-Kūfiyya 'alā al-Aḥjār fī Miṣr fī al-Qurūn al-Kḥamsa al-'Ūlā li'l-Hijra, ma'a Muqāranatin li-Hādhihi al-Kitābāt fī Biqā' 'Ukhrā min al-'Ālam al-Islāmī*, by Ibrāhīm Jumu'a, Dār al-Fikr, Cairo, n.d.

66 "The inscription of Zuhayr, the oldest Islamic inscription (24 AH/644-64 CE), the rise of the Arabic script and the nature of the early Islamic state." Translation and concluding remarks by Robert Hoyland, *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19 (2008), pp. 219-222.

67 *'Ilm al-Iktināh al-'Arabī al-Islāmī*, p.331.

68 *Al-Muqni'* by al-Dānī, p. 22.

69 Ubay ibn Ka'b died in CE 652/32 AH. Indicating that the writing of the Qur'an took place soon after his death.

70 Ibn Kathīr (d.774 AH) saw a big, bulky copy of the Qur'an in the Umayyād Mosque written in ink on parchments which, he thought, were made of Camel's skin.

كَاتِبًا جَلِيلًا عَظِيمًا ضَخْمًا بَنِيَتْ حَسَنٌ مَبِينٌ قَوِيٌّ بِحَبْرِ مُحْكَمٍ فِي رَقٍّ أَظْنَهُ مِنْ جُلُودِ الْإِبِلِ.

According to Kurd Ali, an old copy of the Qur'an was burnt with everything in the mosque in the year 1310 AH (*Khiṭaṭ al-Shām* 5/262), but it seems that some of its folios were rescued and kept in a room in the mosque with other documents until the Ottomans took them to Istanbul before they left Damascus.

71 Cf. Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Qur'an*, 212, 231, 235, 262.

72 *Al-Istī'āb*, by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr 2/538

73 F. Deroche, op.cit. p.135.

74 فَلَا تَقُلْ كَمَا أَفَّ فِيهِ سَبْعَ لُغَاتٍ: قَرَأَ الْحَسَنُ وَأَهْلُ الْمَدِينَةِ (وَلَا تَقُلْ لَهَا أَفَّ) بِالْكَسْرِ وَالتَّنْوِينِ، وَقَالَ أَبُو عَمْرٍو وَأَهْلُ الْكُوفَةِ بِالْكَسْرِ بَغَيْرِ تَنْوِينٍ، وَقَرَأَ أَهْلُ مَكَّةَ وَأَهْلُ الشَّامِ

بالفتح بغير تنوين، وحكى الكسائي والأخفش ثلاث لغات سوى هذه.

75 Other examples include the reading of:

«فَتَبَيَّنُوا»، «فَتَبَيَّنُوا» أو «فاسعوا إلى ذكر الله» بدلاً من «فامضوا إلى ذكر الله».

76 Such as:

كتاب معاني القرآن لأبي زكريا يحيى بن زياد الفراء، توفي: ٢٠٧هـ، وفضائل القرآن ومعاله وآدابه لأبي عبيد القاسم بن سلام توفي: ٢٢٤هـ، وسور القرآن وآياته وحروفه ونزوله، للفضل بن شاذان، توفي: بعد سنة: ٢٩٠هـ والمصاحف لأبي بكر عبد الله بن سليمان بن الأشعث السجستاني توفي: ٣١٦هـ، والوقف والابتداء لأبي بكر محمد بن القاسم بن بشار الأندلسي توفي: ٣٢٨هـ، وهجاء مصاحف الأمصار لأبي العباس أحمد بن عمار المهدي توفي: ٤٣٠هـ، والبديع في رسم مصاحف عثمان لأبي عبد الله محمد بن يوسف الجهني توفي: ٤٤٢هـ، والمفنع في مرسوم مصاحف الأمصار، والمحكم في نقط المصاحف كلاهما للإمام أبي عمرو عثمان بن سعيد الداني توفي: ٤٤٤هـ، والإيضاح في القراءات لأحمد بن أبي عمر الأندلسي توفي: ٤٧٠هـ، ومختصر التنزيل لأبي داود سليمان بن نجاح توفي: ٤٩٦هـ، وعقيلة أتراب القصائد لأبي القاسم القاسم بن فيرة بن خلف الشاطبي توفي: ٥٩٠هـ، والوسيلة إلى كشف العقيلة لأبي الحسن علي بن محمد السخاوي توفي: ٦٤٣هـ، ومورد الظمآن في رسم وضبط القرآن لمحمد بن محمد بن إبراهيم الأموي الشريشي الحرّازي توفي: ٧١٨هـ، وشرح إبراهيم بن أحمد بن سليمان المارغني الكتاب في: دليل الحيران شرح مورد الظمآن في رسم وضبط القرآن.

77 Al-Dānī, *al-Muḥkam fī Naqṭ al-Maṣāḥif, al-Muqni'*, ed. Qamḥāwī, p. 19.

78 Al-Dānī, *al-Tanbīh 'alā al-Khaṭa' wa'l-Jahl wa'l-Tamwīh*, ed. Ayub Bulas'ad, Tatwan 2012, p. 33.

79 Al-Nadīm saw a copy of a Qur'ān written by him:

ورأيت مصحفاً بخط جدهم مقلة.

80 Al-Ṣamhūdī dismissed all the reports concerning the existence of the *Imām Muṣḥaf*, cf. *Wafā' al-Wafā'*, my edition, Al-Furqān Foundation - London 2001, 2/457-461. He quotes Ibn al-Najjār as saying: "Dathara 'alā ṭūl al-zamān wa tafarraḡat awrāquh (Due to the great length of time, it has become obliterated and its sheets scattered)."

81 Al-Marrākishi, (d. 703AH) *al-Dhayl wa'l-Takmila*, 1/156, 6/386, 8/87, 196.

82 *Al-Mawā'iz wa'l-I'tibār*, 2/526, 575.

83 This is a resume of the information introduced by A.R. Momin, *Al-Muṣḥaf Al-Sharif*, The IOS Minaret, an online Islamic Magazine, vol,7, Issue 07-8, 16 August, p. 17-18. I think it is now kept in al-Husain Mosque, in Cairo.

84 Quoting al-Qāsim ibn Sallām's testimony, *Aḍwā' 'alā Muṣḥaf 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān*, by Sahar El-Sayyid 'Abd al-Aziz al-Sālim, Cairo 1411/1991, p. 38.

85 *Qur'āns of the Umayyads*, pp. 77 and 108.

86 J. Sourdél-Thomine, D. Sourdél, A propos des Documents du la Grande Mosquee de Damas Concerves a Istanbul, in: *Revue des Etudes Islamique*, XXXIII, PP.73-85.

87 The copy in al-Husain Mosque in Cairo has 1087 folios, and it weighs 80 kilograms.

88 Ibrāhīm Muḥammad al-Jurmī, *Mu'jam 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Dār al-Qalam, Damascus 1422/2001, p. 13.

89 *Tuhfat al-Nāzirin*, Cairo 1315 AH, pp155-6.

90 *Early Qur'āns* J.J. Marcel Collection, by O.V. Vasilyeva and O.M. Yastrebova.

91 *Qur'āns of the Umayyads*, A First Overview, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2014, p.17. He also reiterates this in his other studies.

92 Behnam Sadighi and U. Bergmann, Sadighi and Mohsen Goudarzi, E. Puin and others.

93 Enumerated fully by F. Deroche in his *Qur'āns of the Umayyads*, p. 48, f. 32-35.

94 أبي بن كعب: بن قيس بن عبيد بن زيد بن معاوية بن النجار الأنصاري الخزرجي، أبو المنذر، سيد القراء من فضلاء الصحابة توفي في سنة 32هـ/652م. الإصابة 1/ 31. أسد الغابة 1/ 17. الاستيعاب 1/ 27.

95 *Al-Intiṣār li'l-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad 'Iṣām al-Qudāh, Beirut 2001, 1/279, 2/470.

96 *Qur'āns of the Umayyads*, p, 52.

97 Behnam Sadighi and Uwe Bergmann, *The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurān of the Prophet, Arabica* 57 (2010), p, 391.

98 ليس في ترتيب السور نص ولا توقيف.

99 Cf. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fi 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* 2/172, Jawād 'Alī; al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārikh al-'Arab qabl al-Islām, 8/269.

100 *Tārikh al-Ṭabari*, account of the year 198 AH.

101 *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Volume 58, Issue 1, pp. 131- 148.

102 Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, 13/126-127; *'Ilm al-Iktināh al-'Arabī al-Islāmī*, 2nd ed. King Faisal Center, Riyadh 2008, p. 250-251.

103 Op.cit. *'Ilm al-Iktināh al-'Arabī al-Islāmī*.

104 Ahmed Chouqi Binebine, *Taqniyat Fahrasat al-Makhṭūṭāt al-'Arabiyya*, King 'Abdul 'Aziz foundation, Casablanca 1990, p. 250.

105 <http://www.christoph-heger.de/palimpse.htm>

106 *Qur'āns of the Umayyads*, p, 56.

107 Op.cit. p. 142.

108 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa'l-I'tibār* 4/30-31. The reciter read it word by word.

109 Op.cit. 4/31.

110 Sūrat Ṣād 38/23, نَجْعَةٌ بَدَلًا مِنْ نَعْبَةٍ

111 Behnam Sadighi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurān of the Prophet", *Arabica* 57 (2010) 343-436. The Stanford '07, lower text, verso. Kor 2, 197-205; or by the folio's own numbering, Kor 2, 194-202 and Stanford '07, lower text, recto. Kor 2, 191-6; or by the folio's own numbering, Kor 2, 188-93.

112 www.islamic-awareness.org/New/update10.html

113 *Qur'āns of the Umayyads*, p, 54.

- 114 Op.cit. p. 353.
- 115 Op.cit, p. 55-56.
- 116 Behnam Sadighi and Uwe Bergmann, op.cit. p. 391.
- 117 <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-35151643>

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ردمك: ISBN: 978-1-78814-689-0

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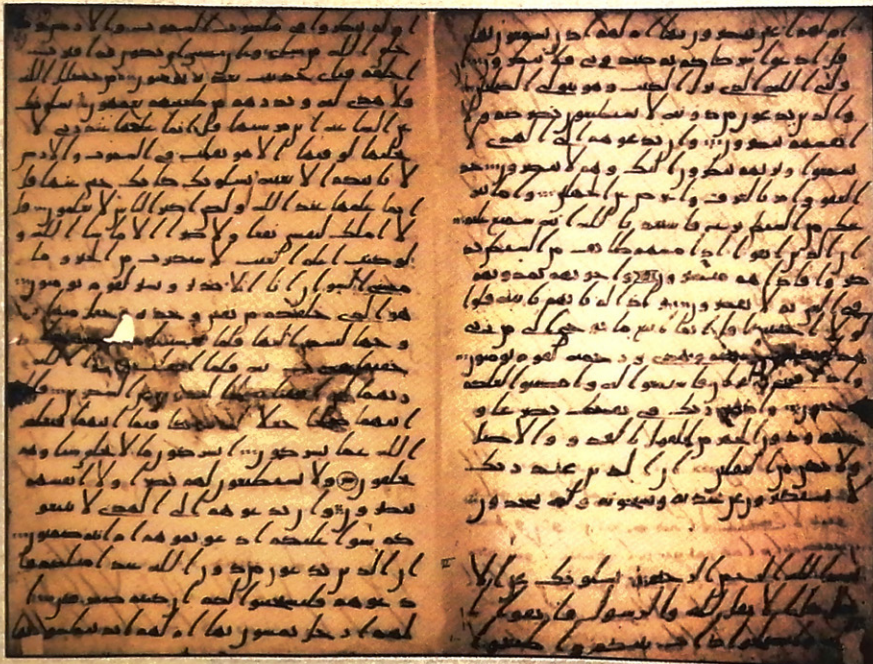


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